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THE VAMPIRE WOMEN

From his mouldy coffin
of deathless sleep
Count Dracula rises again—
ravenous for a feast of blood!

by Victor Samuels

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GORGED ON AN ORGY OF BLOOD

The light of my torch touched the inside of the coffin, and there in the casket, lay Count Dracula. I stood, shocked with fear and wonder.

Suddenly a rumbling sound came from the casket. I watched the body twitch and move. A moistness of blood seeped from between the lips and the mouth seemed to puff up. Blood suddenly trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran down over the swollen chin and the bloated neck. He looked completely gorged with blood. It made my stomach turn just to see the awful creature. He lay there like a filthy leech, exhausted and completely sated with his human prey.

THE VAMPIRE WOMEN

by Victor Samuels

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Chapter 1

The castle stood high in the mountains, over a rocky gorge. Many people had lived within its walls and many had died. No one would live in it now. For forty years it had remained empty and apart, and in all the world not a living soul cared if it stood or fell.

Not a living soul. . . .

Chapter 2

Victoria Hamilton's Diary

October 3rd—Today we have begun the last leg in what seems an incredibly long journey. Nearly three thousand miles from the West Coast to New York; that far again over the ocean, and a thousand miles across the continent of Europe to get to Budapest; and still a long trip ahead of us before we reach our destination. Notwithstanding my fear of flying, I think if we had it to do over again, I would take John's suggestion and come by plane.

Dear John. Surely the sweetest husband in the world. He looked up just now and saw me writing and said, "So you were serious about keeping a diary."

"If you're going to keep one," I said, "it seems only right that I keep one too. That way, there'll be two sides to everything."

He smiled slightly. I think he was amused at the suggestion that any writing of mine might be scientifically useful. But he did not voice this opinion.

"I have to keep one," he said. "This trip isn't exactly a pleasure junket."

"I'll buy that," Carolyn said, leaning forward to peer out of the train window. Outside, on the platform of the little station we were creeping through, a group of men stared back coldly. "Look at those men. Talk about dark types. Are they Slovaks, do you think?"

"Szekelys, perhaps," John said absentmindedly, giving his attention back to his journal. "They claim to be descended from Attila and his Huns."

"I shouldn't doubt it," Carolyn replied. "Look at those eyes. They give me the shivers." She clutched at herself as if she were chilled and gave me a wide grin. Frankly, for Carolyn the trip is little more than a pleasure junket. John had to come for scientific purposes. He is with the *International Geophysical Society*. I underline that because I am so proud of him. He is only twenty-nine and already he is earning a name for himself in scientific circles. Professor Barton at Tech told me that John is one of the most brilliant people in the study of earthquake phenomena.

I'm ashamed to have to write this, but the truth is, I can't be much more explicit than that about his work or the purpose of our trip. I haven't a scientific mind, and though he's explained it all at length, it is only a muddle to me. It has to do with the causes of earthquakes, which have been linked to movements of underground waters. I.G.S. scientists have been investigating earth movements around the world, and a series of tremors in the Carpathian Mountains brought Rumania into the picture.

That is how John happens to be on his way to Rumania. And as his wife I, of course, felt that my place was with him, although at this moment I think I would rather be back in California in our own little house. As for Carolyn, my baby sister (I shouldn't call her a baby, really. She resents it as, at twenty, she is only three years younger than I) felt that it would be a lark to come with us and actually see life behind the Iron Curtain.

"You won't see much life where we're going," John had warned her. "Except wildlife. The spot we're headed for is a pretty isolated one."

"I don't care. I shall find it fascinating," she had insisted, and John had yielded patiently. The agreement between the Society and the Rumanian government permitted him to bring his wife and an assistant, and when Carolyn heard this, she quickly declared that she would be his assistant. It means more work for him, of course, since Carolyn will be of no use in his work. But she wanted to come, and frankly I liked the idea of having her along to keep me company as John knew. So Carolyn is with us.

Well, she is enjoying the trip more than I. All day long, while I am impatient at the way we dawdle along, she keeps leaning toward the window, crying, "Oh, look at that;" and "Isn't that remarkable?" I think she has caught the gypsy spirit of the people we pass in the stations.

October 4th—It seems that this journey will never end. I feel as if I have spent all of my life on hard seats in chugging, heaving trains. John has warned us that the place we will be staying will not be very luxurious.

"The Rumanian government is providing us with quarters," he explained. "But we'll be out in the mountains, so it's not likely there'll be much choice in accommodations. We'll be lucky to get some sort of shepherd's shack."

I smiled and told him I was sure we would be comfortable. Not wanting to complain, I did not add that I thought a tent and a bed on the ground would seem luxurious after this trip. The train service across Western Europe was fine, really, the best I've ever experienced. But in the communist countries there are no first class trains. That means that all of the service is slow, and all of the equipment is old and in disrepair.

Well, we haven't much longer to bear it.

We spent last night in a town called Klausenburgh. We had decided in advance that the trip was too long and the connections too poor to attempt to make it without a break, so we have been stopping for the nights.

We had a delicious chicken dish for dinner last night, which, as I learned from the waiter, is called "paprika hendle". I hope I can get the recipe while we are in the general area. As far as I know, we'll be here for months, so I don't think there is any hurry about such things.

Breakfast was peculiar—peculiar because none of us are used to much more than coffee and toast. But we had learned that the trains did not have dining service and we would probably have to travel all day with no food, so we all ate heartily. The hotel served us stuffed eggplant and something called mamaliga, which was a type of porridge with paprika. Odd dishes for breakfast, but we had also realized that one should not provoke people too much in these countries. Everything had been planned (and paid for) in advance, and our duty was to go along with the plans without causing problems.

The country through which we are passing is beautiful, in a wild sort of way. We've gone by numerous old castles sitting atop knolls and mountain peaks, looking like something from Disneyland. There are streams and rivers and rough gorges. The towns are few and small; I begin to see what John meant when he said we would be isolated. We are moving toward a range of distant mountains that John tells me are the Carpathians. That name has an ominous ring, though I can't think why.

The people we see in the towns are dark, with black hair and heavy mustaches. They all look distant, even unfriendly, although some women in the last vil-

lage looked at us with very frank curiosity. At every town and station we see men in uniform, reminding us that this is not a free country. There have been frequent checks of our papers and baggage, but as we are traveling under government auspices we are never inconvenienced for long. At the last checkpoint I noticed one of the uniformed men taking resentful note of my jewelry and my fur. I think they do not see much of these things here. When he had departed and we were on our way again, I removed all of my jewelry except my wedding ring and put it all in the traveling case. I felt safer about it then.

October 6th—How exhausted I am. I can't think how people manage to travel constantly and enjoy it. Of course, they don't spend days in shaky old trains and rattling buses. We are in a bus now, but it's a far cry from the luxurious, modern vehicles we are used to in the States. This one is so old I wonder how it can get up some of these steep grades. As a matter-of-fact, it barely does get up some of them, as Carolyn pointed out.

"I could walk up the hill faster than this," she said in a whisper.

"Not carrying all our luggage," I said. "Besides, if you really want to know, John warned me last night that we might end up making part of the journey in a wagon. Transportation is still rather primitive here."

We were both whispering because the bus was crowded with locals, those dark-haired, dark-eyed peasants; and we were in the company of a very somber gentleman in a military uniform who is to accompany us the rest of the way to our destination.

And what a destination! Drakula Castle. The idea of our living for some months in a castle is thrilling in itself. But from what I have gathered from bits and

pieces of conversation (we're afraid to talk freely in the presence of our personal commissar) this one is out of the ordinary even as castles go.

Well, I've skipped a day in this little book, so I had best fill in that blank. I have a confession which I could not dare tell anyone aloud. I have a purpose in keeping this diary. It is my personal conviction that my husband will someday be very famous. It may even be this very journey that will put the seal upon his success. In that event, every scrap of information about him will be precious. People will want to know as many of the details of his life as they can glean; not only his scientific work, which will be amply recorded in his journals, but the little personal glimpses that make a biography come to life. A century from now some eager student may be fascinated to know that paprika has kept my husband awake most of the last few nights. We've had paprika hendle, in one form or another, every day now. I don't think I shall bother getting the recipe.

The evening before last we arrived at Bistrita, our last train destination. I suppose that was why we were met there by our military companion, whose name is Skinsky. I rather doubt that that spelling is correct, but that's what it sounds like and he is so unfriendly that I hesitate to ask him for the correct spelling of his name.

"There is a bus tomorrow for Bukovina," he explained on our way to the hotel. "I have reserved passages on it for us. We will leave it at the Borgo Pass."

He explained all this to John, seemingly assuming that these place names would be significant to John. He was right. John had spent a great deal of time studying maps of the areas, and he seemed to follow this route in his mind with no difficulty.

"Then we'll be right in the Carpathians?" he asked.

Mr. Skinsky (Officer Skinsky?) nodded. He was not overly generous with words. Because he seemed disinterested in Carolyn and myself I had given my attention instead to the village through which we were driving. We were in a taxi, and what a car! It was to my surprise a Ford, but of a vintage much older than I could identify. Prewar, certainly, and showing its age.

A thought occurred to me just then, and I turned in the seat to ask, "I suppose there's some sort of house where we're going?"

He smiled in what I thought was a patronizing way. "My government has made available to you Castle Drakula. I think you will find it big enough."

"Or too big," John said, frowning. "I suppose everybody thinks of Americans as wanting the biggest of everything, but a castle is a bit more than we require."

"There are no other houses where you will want to go," Skinsky said flatly. "The area specified in your communications is quite isolated."

"But if there are people living there. . . ."

"The castle is empty. It has been the property of the government for many years. It was available and, by chance, was in the exact location you desired."

John seemed satisfied with this, but Carolyn was not. I had noticed her giving Skinsky a peculiar look when he mentioned our destination. At the next pause in the conversation, she asked, "What was the name of that castle again?"

He seemed to find her question amusing for reasons I could not understand. "Drakula. Do you know of it?" he asked.

She gave him a look that I thought was a bit uneasy. Well, of course she would be uneasy. We are all ill at ease, tired and cross. I would be happy to get any-

where just to be done with traveling. But a castle. That is rather an exciting thought.

"I recognize that name," Carolyn said. "It's been used in books and movies. Not very pleasant ones."

Something registered in my own mind then. I had been thinking the name was familiar, and suddenly it came to me.

"Drakula, of course," I said. "Those monster movies. He was a werewolf or something like that."

"A vampire," Carolyn supplied.

I could not suppress a shudder, although as a rule I am not susceptible to such fantasy horrors.

"What an odd coincidence," I said, "considering that the name is so unusual."

"Is it only coincidence?" Carolyn asked.

Our companion seemed more amused than ever. He spoke as if addressing a group of not-very-bright children. "Count Drakula was a Wallachian nobleman of the 15th century," he said. "A real one, not a make-believe one. He was a great fighter and a hero, a general who led many battles against the Turks. He was also a man whose private appetites were a little strong. It was common with the so-called nobility. The class system encouraged a master-slave relationship, which in turn led to many perversities. Drakula was greatly hated and feared by his own people. They called him a monster.

"When a Mr. Stoker, who was a writer of sorts, came across the stories of Drakula, he took the word monster literally and wrote a book in which he included every sort of myth and fantasy, and in so doing besmirched a great old name, even though he did change the spelling of the count's name slightly—D-R-A-C-U-L-A."

He paused and looked from Carolyn to me. "Of course, if these tales frighten you. . . ."

John, who had not seemed to be listening, said at once, "My assistant and I are scientists, and my wife is not the sort to be frightened by a lot of ghost stories."

Skinsky nodded, but he gave me a glance that suggested he did not fully believe my husband's evaluation of me. Perhaps he was right and John was mistaken. The idea of a castle haunted by tales of vampires made me nervous for a while. But I have pushed that thought aside, and I am really looking forward to seeing the castle. Truly I am.

We had come by this time to the hotel at which we were to spend the night. It was a thoroughly charming place, quite old-fashioned—primitive, even—but after the long train trip, it was a welcome sight. We were greeted by a cheerful woman and a man in shirt sleeves. They seemed pleased to see us. I suppose there are not many travelers here. We were given clean, comfortable rooms.

Our companion did not share dinner with us—paprika hendle again under a different name. Carolyn brought up the subject of Castle Drakula.

"It's funny, isn't it," she said, eating the chicken with a gusto I no longer felt it warranted. "I always thought the Drakula stories were pure fiction. In my wildest dreams I would never have suspected we'd be going to live in Drakula's very castle."

I was about to reply, but the woman who had greeted us and who also happened to be serving our table chose that very moment to drop a serving dish on the floor. It broke with a loud crash, sending pottery and stewed carrots flying about the room, and there was a general commotion for several moments. Her husband came out, and there was a rapid and excited exchange of comments in a tongue I did not know. I supposed he was scolding her for being so

clumsy in front of guests. There were many furtive glances in our direction. I knew they were discussing us because at one point I distinctly heard her mention the name Drakula. I guessed that she was telling him of our eventual destination. I think he told her to be still. Probably he thought it was not the time nor the place to discuss our travels.

When the woman brought our dessert later, a custard dish, I asked if she knew anything about Castle Drakula. She behaved most strangely, crossing herself and suddenly insisting that she did not understand English well, although up to that time she had spoken it like a native.

When she had gone away, I said to John, "There's something here I don't like. I would swear that woman is frightened at the mention of Castle Drakula."

John gave me an impatient look. Even he was tired from our long trip, and he seemed a bit irritable. "You must remember that the count was thought of as a monster around here. Those old stories would have been handed down by the peasants to their children, getting well embroidered along the way. By this time his name is probably synonymous with the devil."

He put down his fork and grew quite serious. "Now Victoria," he said, "you're not going to start getting womanish about all this, are you? Because if you are, we'd better start making arrangements right away to send you home."

I laughed and assured him I was only curious, and I wasn't frightened at all by any ghost stories. He was a bit dubious, but I think I convinced him and the subject was dropped.

But after that I could hardly tell him that the woman came to see me in the morning before we left

to beg me not to continue our trip. Her English was once again fluent, and she was really quite frightened. She was actually crying while she pleaded with me.

"Oh, please, dear lady, don't go," she sobbed, squeezing my hand in hers.

"But I have to go," I said, trying to be calm in the face of this emotional storm. "My husband has important work to do, and my place is with him."

"But you don't know what sort of place you are going to."

I smiled and perceived that John had been right. In a place such as this, among a simple, emotional people, the perverse behavior of that old count would soon become embroidered with myth and grim fantasy.

When she saw that her entreaties were useless, the kind woman removed from her neck a plain crucifix on a gold chain and insisted upon putting it about my neck. I know John would say I was being superstitious, but I felt better for having it there and thanked the woman heartily before we parted.

We left yesterday at midday in an antiquated bus. Our departure was a bit unusual. A crowd of local people had crowded about the hotel to watch us board the bus. It was, I assumed, because strangers were infrequent here. When we mounted the rusty steps, the villagers made the sign of the cross and pointed two fingers at us. When we were underway, I asked Skinsky what the gesture meant.

"It is a charm against the evil eye," he said with a mocking smile.

I let the subject drop. I do not like the commissar at all. I hope he won't be living with us at the castle. Will they think we need watching? I hope not. I shall be nervous with someone looking over my shoulder all the time.

Anyway, that was yesterday. . . . Since then we

have done nothing but travel. We traveled through the night at our snail's pace, stopping briefly at crude inns along the way for meals and relief. And today is nearly over. It will soon be sundown and still we creep along in our rattling bus. I asked Skinsky several times when will we reach the Borgo Pass, and each time he only told me, "Soon." I hardly slept at all last night, sitting up in a hard seat, bouncing about without cessation.

I shall sleep for a week when we reach that castle. I don't care if a legion of werewolves and vampires and the Frankenstein monster itself is roaming the halls.

Well, it is an adventure.

I no longer find the countryside beautiful. I am sick of it.

Chapter 3

Letter from Miss Carolyn Stuart to Mr. Walter Bradshaw, Los Angeles, California, U. S. A.

October 6th
Darling Walter,

To begin with, you must forgive my writing if it looks a little shaky. We are riding in an absolute Toonerville bus and have been since yesterday noon, going up the most God awful mountain road I have ever seen. I wouldn't be the slightest bit surprised if any minute now we ran right off the edge of the world and landed on the back of a giant tortoise. Every bone in my body feels shattered. My stomach is in violent protest against the awful food we have been eating. And poor Victoria looks absolutely so defeated that I have no choice but to try to keep up a "brave front". What I wouldn't give just now to be back in Westwood, having a delicious sundae and people-watching with you.

Oh, I can just hear you saying, "You didn't have to go." And it's true, naturally. But what could I do? I couldn't let Victoria come to the end of the world by herself; and John doesn't count. He gets so wrapped up in his work that he forgets to breathe. And you know what a helpless case Victoria is. Do you know she never learned to drive a car? In Los Angeles! Imagine.

Oh, I haven't even told you my really great news. You'll never, never imagine where we are going to be

living. I'm not making this up, honest I'm not. We are headed for the castle of Count Drakula, no less.

It's true. There really was a count, centuries ago. Our guide—the grimmest man I've ever seen—hinted at some dark doings. Something sadistic, I expect. And that gave birth to all those hysterical legends. Isn't it too much?

Ouch! We just went over a vicious bump. It really has been rough; but not uninteresting. The people are not awfully friendly. The bus is crowded but no one speaks to us, although they are obviously curious and I often catch them looking at us in what I think writers call a "guarded" manner. In the last town the news of our destination got around and everyone carried on something dreadful, making the sign of the cross and all. Victoria won't admit it, but she's frightened by that sort of thing. She thinks I haven't noticed she's wearing a crucifix.

We're traveling through truly beautiful country, and John amazes me with his knowledge of it. Of course, he's had months to prepare. From Bistrita, where we spent the night (night before last, that is; last night we spent on this bus) we drove through a green, sloping land. Forest and hills, that sort of thing. Gabled farmhouses alongside the road. John calls this the Mittel Land, and he says that the roads have always been kept in poor condition. In olden times, the natives did not repair them because war was always a threat, and if the neighboring Turks saw the roads being repaired, they would think the locals were preparing for war and so would launch one themselves.

We began to drive into the Carpathians themselves. They tower to the right and to the left of us, the sun falling full upon them and bringing out a rainbow of colors—deep blue and purple in the shadows, green and brown in the sun, and all those craggy cliffs lead-

ing off into the distance, becoming snowy peaks. It is spectacular. From time to time one sees the white gleam of falling water cutting across the face of the mountains. Our route up into these mountains is serpentine. We have on three occasions passed horse drawn carts, and since Bistrita, ours is the only engined vehicle I've seen. That's how primitive it is here. There are many crosses along the road. Shrines of some sort, I guess.

It is nearly night. The light has almost gone, and the mountain peaks are pink with sunset. The people in the bus have begun to stir, as if they expected something to happen soon. Perhaps we are almost there. In any event, I can't see to write any more so I shall close and write again from the castle.

Oh, one more funny. A short time back we had to stop because the bus was overheating going up a hill. I thought maybe we'd have to walk a ways, but it seems this is standard procedure, and when the engine had cooled off, we started on our way again. But while we were there, I tried to get off the bus to stretch my legs. I don't know what the driver thought I was planning to do, but he nearly had fits. I never did get off the bus, and all our guide would say was that it was forbidden to get out and stroll around where we were. Talk about regulations! Suppose my trip had been necessary?

I can't see the paper any more. Bye for now.

Love,
Carolyn

Chapter 4

John Hamilton's Journal

7th October

We are here at last. It has been a grueling trip, and Victoria is showing it. I suspect I am as well. Carolyn seems bright and fresh as always. She looks so frail but has incredible strength and self-discipline.

Yesterday we traveled through the Mittel Land. I saw apple trees, plum, pear and cherry, as well as weeping birch, the latter delicate green and silvery looking without their leaves.

Have seen a few peasants in costumes that date back centuries. Indeed, except for our bus, we seem to have stepped back in time. There is little or no evidence of the twentieth century here. The world has passed this region by.

Last evening got very cold. As twilight fell the shadows seemed to merge with the early snow, creating a contrast of white. As we wound up into the pass, the darkness seemed to close down upon us.

I must guard against becoming fanciful. That way lies folly. There is too much here for the imagination to feed upon.

With night our driver urged the bus on at as fast a pace as it could manage. We rocked about as if on a stormy sea. I knew we were approaching the Pass. The people in the bus seemed to be excited. Some were very curious and some looked downright fright-

ened. It is those silly legends about that Wallachian—Drakula, I think the name was. I gather that he was the subject of some books or movies. I never had time for things like that. In fact, they never really interested me much. I was always intrigued with facts, not fantasies.

At last the bus stopped and Skinsky motioned that it was time for us to get off. The driver kept racing his motor and speaking rapidly in the Rumanian tongue. I have given some study to the tongue, but this was too rapid, and the local accent confused me. The gist of it was that he wanted us to hurry, hurry, hurry. He was most impatient to have us off the bus so he could be on his way. That seems to be universal with bus drivers, but this man behaved as if it were a life and death matter.

He needn't have urged us, however, since we were all as eager to be off that infernal conveyance as he was to have us off. It had been an uncomfortable trip, to put it mildly.

I was not surprised to discover a horse cart waiting to take us the rest of the way. We were really out of the twentieth century now. Carolyn groaned loudly. Victoria looked a bit grim, but she offered no complaint. I patted her hand and told her we hadn't much further to go, although frankly I myself didn't know the exact location of the castle.

The cart was a covered affair, probably not unlike those in which our ancestors crossed the American prairies. The driver was a stout, mustached gentleman who did not seem very pleased to see us. I handed up our luggage and helped the women into the cart, and we were on our way almost at once, Skinsky seated inside with us.

I was facing the rear and could see out, so I kept a

fair idea of our travels. I had a glimpse of our bus speeding on its way to Bukovina and I must confess, in the cold darkness, I felt a pang that we were not continuing on with them. But this fancy passed quickly.

We set off at a rapid pace. We talked little. It was difficult to judge time in the dark, tired as we were, but the trip was not a short one. We heard a dog howling somewhere in the distance and another answering it. It seemed to me that the horses were nervous, but the driver spoke to them in a soothing manner and they went on.

I dozed but woke when Victoria gripped my arm tightly. In the distance there was a strange new sound, a sharper, more eerie howling.

"What on earth is that?" Victoria asked Skinsky, though I already knew what his answer would be.

"Wolves," he said. He tried to look unconcerned but I had a feeling that was only an act. I did not doze again.

We were in a deep forest now, hemmed in by trees and great towering rocks. The wind rushed down through this narrow pass with a roar, rattling the branches of the trees. It had begun to snow. We were climbing higher up into the mountains and the night had grown deadly cold. Victoria huddled closer to me for warmth. The howling of the wolves seemed to be louder; I could not say for certain.

From where she sat, Victoria had a view, if a limited one, out the front of our cart. We suddenly came to a halt, and at the same time Victoria again tightened her grip on my arm and gave a little gasp.

"A group of young women," she said, looking at us with a shocked expression. "Four or five of them, standing in the road."

Skinsky had jumped up from his seat and crowded

past us to get to the front so that it was a moment before I could squeeze past Victoria and have a look out the front of the wagon.

When I did, I caught my breath sharply. "You may be partly right," I said over my shoulder to my wife. "Some of these creatures may be females, but I think it an error to call them women."

"Why, what on earth do you mean?" she asked, unable to see now as I was blocking the view. "I saw them as plain as day, all in white and not even wearing any coats."

"We are surrounded by a pack of wolves," I said as bluntly as I could.

It was quite true. The moon had pierced the dark clouds to reveal a ring of wolves, blocking the road and surrounding the wagon. In the silvery light I saw the fierce white teeth and the lolling tongues and the coarse, shaggy hair. There might have been fifteen or twenty of them. They were silent now, staring at us with eyes that looked red in the night.

I am no coward, but I do not hesitate to admit that I was struck dumb with fear. Their silence made them more horrible than when I had heard them howling. It was the sort of horror that every man dreams of coming face to face with in his worst nightmare.

The silence was suddenly broken. The wolves began to howl, setting up a terrible din. The horses neighed and snorted and reared, torn between their desire for flight and the ring of terror that encircled us.

Skinsky wore a gun belt and the driver had produced a rifle from under his seat. Shots rang out. Neither of the men seemed to be very good marksmen, for although the beasts were within ten feet of us, not a single wolf fell.

Despite this fact, however, the shots seemed to pro-

duce results. After another grim moment, the wolves turned and disappeared as quickly as they had come, melting into the darkness of the forest. The horses bolted forward with a lurch that threw me back into my seat. We were once again underway. Victoria's eyes were wide with terror; Carolyn looked stricken. At the moment, I was too shaken myself to be much comfort to either of them.

We went on even faster than before, climbing, climbing . . . higher and higher . . . up into those dark, dark mountains.

Suddenly the cart took a fast curve. I had a glimpse of a crumbling stone wall and a gate that hung lopsidedly from one hinge and then we were in a courtyard and had come to a stop.

"We have arrived," Skinsky said, and I thought that even that unfeeling man was glad our trip was ended.

I got out of the cart after him and helped the women down. We were in a courtyard that was partly overgrown with brush, dry and brown now with the winter. We stood before a vast and crumbling castle. The broken battlements made a jagged silhouette against the moonlit sky. The place looked desolate and forbidding.

We had arrived at the Castle Drakula.

Chapter 5

Report of Commissar Branislav Skinsky to Under Secretariat, People's Republic, Council for Economic Assistance, Bukovina, Rumania.

October 8th

Arrived Castle Drakula 0:20 hours. American scientific party of John Hamilton, assistant Carolyn Stuart, wife Victoria Hamilton, delivered and placed under custody of Citizens Stefen and Olga Petrof. American party all in good health. Have observed nothing of a suspicious nature to date. From all appearances the purpose of their stay—investigation of earthquake causation—seems legitimate. Have alerted the Petrofs to be observant. They have issued their assurance that the Secretariat will be advised immediately if anything of a questionable nature arises during the Hamilton party sojourn.

Written in hand this 8th day of October.

S—B. Skinsky, C.R.A.

Chapter 6

Victoria Hamilton's Diary

October 8th

I'm afraid all my lovely thoughts of staying in a fairy book castle vanished the moment I set eyes on this nightmarish place last night—or I guess it was very early this morning. I was sure that I would fall asleep on my feet while on our way here, but now that we have arrived the dawn is just breaking and I feel wide awake. Perhaps bringing these pages up to date might help make me drowsy enough to fall asleep.

A wolf pack! Imagine! I saw John making entries in his journal, so I am sure he has made mention of our narrow escape from the jaws of a hideous wolf pack. He was so marvelous, so calm and steady. Truthfully, I was sure that Carolyn and I were going to faint, but I suppose it was fear itself that kept us conscious and alert to the danger.

But the wolves were not half so frightening as the strange group of women I had seen moments before. John couldn't have seen them, but I know I wasn't mistaken and that the shadows of the night were not playing tricks on me. I saw women—three or four of them—all dressed in white and staring straight at us. The very thought of those eyes makes me shiver still.

The driver took Skinsky away the moment we disembarked from the covered wagon that brought us

here. Actually I feel much like one of our early pioneers stranded in hostile Indian country.

Skinsky. What a strange man. I'm sure he is convinced that we are some kind of American spy detail sent here to undermine the People's Communist Republic. It could use a bit of undermining, believe me. Everyone is so dour, so poor and impoverished looking. Even here at this crumbling castle the caretaker looks and acts like something right out of an old B-grade movie—very surly, blank expression, cool politeness. His name is Stefen Petrof. I saw him whispering with Skinsky just before Skinsky left us. They all look like Russian agents to me.

I just can't believe this castle. It really scares the wits out of me, but I mustn't let John know that. He'd send me packing in a minute, and I'd let him send me off if I didn't want to be with him so desperately. This is really the first vacation we've had together in years, if one can call this a vacation. But I just could not face that trip back—not yet. I think I'll need at least a month to rest up before wanting to tackle a return trip.

A month in this place? Actually, now that I think about it, I don't know which is the worse of two evils —the castle or the trip back. Skinsky told us that no one has lived in this place for decades. That's more than obvious. After Skinsky drove off we stood in that courtyard, looking up at the frowning walls and blank windows. A great door dominated one wall and I could see bits of light gleaming through its chinks. We went up a few steps and stood before this great door while the man, Stefen Petrof, rattled chains and clanked massive bolts and turned rusted keys. The huge door swung open with a loud grating sound, moving on hinges that had obviously gone unused for many, many years.

"Just like Inner Sanctum," Carolyn commented as we went into the castle.

"Don't joke," I whispered, taking hold of her arm. "I think it's creepy."

She giggled. "Victoria, you'd jump if you saw your own shadow," she said.

Now that just is not true. I'm not the type who frightens easily. Carolyn has always treated me as the helpless sister who needs constant looking after. Actually, I think it is the other way around; I've been protecting her all these years. She thinks she's fooling me, but I have the feeling that my dear little sister is just as unnerved by this decaying old relic of a castle as I am.

Once inside, we met another member of the illustrious People's Republic, Stefen Petrof's wife, Olga. Now there's a pair for you. She's just as surly and unfriendly as he is. But at least they both speak English quite fluently and seem to want to make us comfortable.

My first glimpse at the inside of the castle caused my heart to sink into my shoes. This place hasn't been cleaned in centuries, or so it looks. A mammoth staircase starts up from a wide stone foyer. Downstairs cobwebs and debris are everywhere. I must admit, even the Petrofs seem a bit concerned about the untidiness of the place, especially Olga. She apologized time and time again but assured us that the rooms that were prepared for us were comfortable, as indeed they are. The Petrofs explained that they had not had time to do much with the old place. They'd only been sent up a day or two before. They promised they'd do their best to set things right before long.

Our rooms are charming, if you look upon medieval architecture as charming. They are big and spacious, but rather drafty. Furs are everywhere—on the floors, the walls, the beds, the hearths. Fireplaces are

in abundance, but they don't seem to do much toward cutting the cold unless one snuggles up close to them. The rooms are lighted by oil lamps. I don't know why I had expected electricity. I suppose I was just being fanciful again. John, of course, being the practical type, knew we would be living without modern conveniences. Never having been in a 15th century castle, I assumed the conveniences might be primitive but I never expected them to be *this* primitive. John merely laughs at me whenever I frown at the sanitary facilities afforded us. I guess they are laughable, really.

The apartment in which we are housed consists of three larger rooms and two or three smaller ones. The large rooms are bedrooms for Carolyn and John and me, separated by a huge sitting-dining room. The smaller rooms are to accommodate our toilet and closets for storing luggage and equipment. The sitting room is a delightful place. It is divided into sections. It would be a misnomer to refer to the dining area as an alcove because it could well be looked upon as a separate room it is so large. Off the dining alcove is the sitting area with heavy, comfortable furniture and roaring fireplaces. Opening off this area is a sort of library. The walls are lined floor-to-ceiling with books, and luckily quite a large portion of the books are in English.

The table was laid with a very appetizing-looking supper and after we had refreshed ourselves Carolyn, John and I ate heartily of the very sumptuous repast —paprika hendle, of course (which John groaned about), and two meat dishes that tasted much like veal swimming in a wine sauce and beef simmering in a sauce of sour cream. The food was hot and we all attacked it with gusto. We were half famished after so long and arduous a trip.

The Petrofs did not stay to serve us. Olga said if we needed them there was a bell cord which we could pull. I wonder where they live. Are their quarters as comfortable as ours? Perhaps not. The locals seem to have a strange fascination with making themselves uncomfortable. From all I have seen thus far of this unusual country, comfort is shunned as if it were a sin. I noticed the looks on their faces when we were traveling. The people looked upon us as though we were idolaters, sinners of the first water.

John just dozed off, I see. The dawn looks so beautiful coming up over the mountains. The gloom of last night is a thing of the past already. The sun is bringing another day and I, like John, am beginning to doze. Carolyn went to bed a long time ago. Outwardly, none of this seems to be bothering her. She seemed anxious to go off to her room; almost as though something or someone were there waiting to amuse her. I suspect she wants to be alone to pour her heart out in another letter to Walter. I do hope she is planning to marry him. Walter Bradshaw is a very nice man and exactly what Carolyn needs to settle her down. She's gotten a little too headstrong and independent lately. It's about time she got married. If Walter doesn't settle her down I'm afraid she will wind up being an adventuress. As I thought before, Carolyn has a bit of the gypsy in her.

Chapter 7

John Hamilton's Journal

October 8th PM.

I had one of the best night's sleep in a number of days. Victoria is still sleeping; I assume Carolyn is also. I haven't the least idea of the time, but I see that the Petrofs have cleared away last night's supper and have set out a cold breakfast. Yet the sun is going down, so it is definitely late afternoon or early evening.

The old place is amazing. I can't wait to dig around downstairs and get started with my investigation. I'll need Carolyn's help though, so I'll have to wait until she and Victoria are up and functioning.

I set to and enjoyed the breakfast (thankfully they don't serve paprika hendle for breakfast) and when I finished I looked about the apartment. There are certainly odd deficiencies in the castle, I notice. Considering the extraordinary evidences of wealth, I'm surprised that the place is in such a state of disrepair. Believe it or not, the table service is solid gold. I hadn't noticed it last night, but then the light was so poor I hardly noticed anything at all. Imagine eating off solid gold plates. I can't help wondering how they got here. Surely when the castle was closed up by the Republic the officials would have come in and helped themselves to the treasure trove. But obviously not.

The candlesticks are gold also, I notice, and beautifully wrought. They must be immensely valuable.

Another oddity which I just noticed is that the curtains and upholstery materials on the furniture and windows are made of very costly fabrics and must have been of tremendous value when they were originally manufactured. They're certainly centuries old and really belong in a museum because they are in perfect order.

But with all the display of wealth and luxury there is one thing I've noticed missing. Mirrors. There are no mirrors anywhere. I had half expected silvered glass or polished silverplate to hang on the walls, especially in the toilet closet, but there are none to be found. I had to use my little traveling mirror to shave today. It was a bit awkward and I nicked myself slightly, but in the long run I managed perfectly well.

I just heard a sound that reminded me of last night; the howling of a wolf just rose from outside. Ah, there's another, and another. I wonder if it is the same pack that surrounded our cart last night? Possibly. Last night both Carolyn and Victoria remarked at my bravery in the face of a wolf pack. If only they knew. I must make a mental note to keep my journal from them—at least for a while. I don't think a man should share every secret with his wife, especially a confession of fear. Victoria believes me to be the strongest and bravest of men, both physically and emotionally, and I would like to have her keep on thinking so.

I was just looking about for something to read. In the library just off the sitting room I found vast numbers of books printed both in England and in America, believe it or not. There are whole shelves of them—bound volumes of magazines and newspapers. The table in the middle of the library is stacked high with journals and periodicals (but not of recent date un-

fortunately). The books, I notice, are varied indeed—history, geography, political science, geology, law, botany, biology—all relating to life, customs and manners in England and America. Included in the collection are books on noted personalities of the past and present, including a fairly current *Who's Who* (1969).

Petrof just came in with Olga. They tell me that both Victoria and Carolyn are stirring about in their rooms and will be in shortly to have their breakfast. I'm rather glad because I'm anxious to see more of this place.

"Good morning," Carolyn greeted as she came into the sitting room. "I see you didn't oversleep like Victoria and I."

"I just got up a little bit ago," I told her.

"I wonder what there is about this place that seems to require sleep. It's so restful here."

"Restful?" I asked, arching my eyebrows. "I thought it gave you the creeps last night?"

"That was last night. You know," Carolyn said, stuffing brown bread and cheese into her mouth, "this old place doesn't look half so bad during the day."

"It's almost night again," I reminded her, glancing toward the windows.

She looked outside. "Yes, I guess it is, but it is still quite bright out."

"It won't be for long," I told her. "The night falls very rapidly here in the Carpathians. One minute it's light and the next minute it's dark as pitch. It happens almost before you know it."

"How very odd," Carolyn mused as she concentrated on the cold breakfast buffet.

"Everything about this place is very odd," Victoria said, coming in and kissing me on the cheek. "Good morning, darling."

She looked lovely. The sleep had certainly agreed with her. There was color in her cheeks and her hair had never shone with such brilliance, or so I thought. I suddenly felt romantic and had to smile at myself. I felt the strangest stirrings inside me. I hadn't remembered a sensation like that since I was a lustful lad of seventeen. I took Victoria's hand and pressed my lips into the open palm. She got my message. I could tell when our eyes met. She was blushing.

"You fall asleep too easily and get up too early," she whispered, grinning sheepishly.

She went to the breakfast table and sat across from Carolyn. I joined them, pouring myself a cup of what the Rumanians believe to be American style coffee; at least they call it American coffee, but, believe me, there is no similarity between the two.

"I thought we might start exploring the underground passages as soon as you've finished eating," I said.

I thought I saw Victoria shiver.

Carolyn grinned. "Anything you say, boss," she said brightly.

"If you two are going to go roaming about this old barn, I'm going with you," Victoria said bravely. "I don't want to be left alone, at least not until I've gotten used to the place."

"I thought if we started with the rock samples from the cellars at the front of the castle and gradually worked our way toward the lee side of the mountains we would be able to judge earth movement and geological composition better."

Carolyn leaned toward me. "As long as we are cooped up here, John, and as long as I am supposed to be your assistant, I suppose it might help if you explained just what causes earthquakes anyway. The

Commies might start questioning me so maybe you'd better fill me in on a few things."

I was sure Carolyn wouldn't understand any of it, but it made me feel good that she was at least interested enough to ask.

Victoria got up from her chair. "If you two are going to get all technical," she said, "I'm going to slip into a pair of jeans so I won't ruin this dress in the cellars."

Carolyn sat waiting for me to speak.

"Well," I started speaking slowly, "rocks make up the outer layers of the earth. These rocks are continually being squeezed and stretched by forces from within the earth. The forces probably come from the enormous heat of the earth's interior. When the strain becomes greater than the rocks can stand, the rocks break and cause an earthquake. It's as simple as that."

Carolyn nodded. "So it's because of the mountains that we've come here. The heat of the earth's interior is greater as one goes deeper, right?"

I chuckled. "Well, something like that, Carolyn," I said. "But it isn't only heat that contributes to the earthquake. Sound waves have a lot to do with it."

"Sound waves?"

"Unhuh. Compression or longitudinal waves are really sound waves and travel at a speed of five miles a second. The rocks vibrate in the direction traveled by the wave. This causes the rocks to change volume. Now there are what are known as shear or transverse waves that travel about half as fast as the compression waves. The rocks vibrate at right angles to the direction traveled by the wave and this causes the rocks to change shape. These compression waves and shear waves are what you may have heard referred to as seismic waves."

"Oh, yes. I've heard of seismic waves."

I grinned. "Seismic waves, seismograph, seismology —the study of earthquakes."

Carolyn sighed. "You make it all sound so simple, but I'm sure there are a lot more things to consider beside the whatchamacallit waves."

I laughed. "Indeed, there are," I said. "A lot more, Carolyn. An awful lot more—and quite a bit of it is still unknown to us. That's why I'm here in the Carpathian Mountains."

"Well, spare me the boring details," Carolyn said abruptly, suddenly disinterested. "I'll leave that stuff up to you."

Her sudden change in attitude astonished me. Carolyn was a strange girl. One minute she was very anxious to be informed, and a second later she was bored and restless and disinterested. She wasn't at all like her older sister, Victoria. Victoria was sensible and honest, and if she didn't want to know about anything she didn't pretend interest in it. On the other hand, if she wanted to know about something, she wanted to know absolutely everything there was to know about the subject. I shrugged away the thought. Perhaps I was being prejudiced against Carolyn simply because I was very much in love with her sister, my wife, Victoria.

As I watched Carolyn resume eating, I thought of one word: Scatterbrain!

"Well here I am," Victoria announced as she came back into the sitting room, dressed in an old pair of blue jeans, a plaid shirt and with a scarf tied about her hair. "Aren't you going to change, Carolyn?" she asked.

I saw a strange look come over Carolyn's face. "What for?" she asked.

"Well," Victoria said, smiling, "you aren't really dressed for digging around in dirty old cellars. You look more like you're off on a date."

"Maybe I am," Carolyn said offhandedly.

"And what does that mean?"

Carolyn shrugged and got up from the table. "Let's go if we're going," she said.

Victoria threw me a helpless glance, and we followed Carolyn out of the room.

"Which door do you think leads to the cellars?" Carolyn asked, going from door to door and trying the knobs. "These are all locked."

"Maybe we'll have to get the keys from Petrof," Victoria said as she too tried several doors and found them locked.

As if summoned, Petrof appeared behind me. I saw him so unexpectedly that he startled me. "Oh, Petrof," I said. "It seems these doors are all locked. Do you have the keys? I'd like to gain access to the cellars."

"There are no keys to these doors," he said.

There was a certain glint in his eye that told me he was not telling the truth, but I was not about to make an issue of it. "Then fetch me a crowbar or something," I told him. "I'm sure these doors open on to the stairway that leads down into the cellars. I've been sent to investigate the underground and I can't very well do that unless I reach it, now can I?" I held Petrof's stare. He wasn't going to fetch the crowbar, I could tell. "Your ministry expects a report from me," I added. "I want to give them that report, but I won't be able to unless I receive the cooperation necessary."

The expression in Petrof's eyes changed from hostility to fear. I suppose it was dropping the word "ministry" that did it. He went scurrying off. We kept

trying door after door but every passage seemed either to be locked or inaccessible.

Finally Petrof returned—empty-handed. He motioned to us. "If you must investigate the cellars," he said, "you will kindly follow me. The passage is this way."

He was looking at me as though he had just won a private victory over me. He had not produced the keys; he had not produced the crowbar. I'd been prevented from seeing behind the locked doors; and yet he'd made available to me that which I had come to the castle for—access to the underground rooms and passages. He was gloating. I understood now why some of these people are disliked by outsiders. Petrof wasn't a very likable individual.

The passage Petrof showed us was cut into the side of the wall under the curve of the main staircase—the one that stretched upward from the central hallway—the one sagging under the weight of huge cobwebs and debris.

I carried a flashlight, and when Petrof pushed open the door, I flicked on the switch and took the lead. I felt Victoria's hand tighten in mine. I knew instinctively that her other hand was fastened lightly around Carolyn's.

Now I know how Orpheus felt going into the underground for Eurydice. My flashlight, strong as it was, didn't seem to help much. Carolyn was the first to notice the heavy torches spaced along the walls. We began lighting them as we descended, but even the strong, sharp light of the torches didn't make the place less forbidding, less ominous looking.

Halfway down the steep stone stairs, Victoria sank her nails into my hand and stifled a scream. "A rat," she said, half apologizing for losing her nerve. "It ran over my foot."

I patted her hand and pulled her closer to me. I myself was slightly unnerved by this gloomy place. I had expected to be working under the earth, but I had anticipated tunnels or caves or caverns and not man-made cellars, particularly cellars and passages such as the ones we found ourselves in.

Gray dust lay everywhere. Here and there along the walls were torture devices of every kind and description. Some still held the bones of victims (Victoria and Carolyn were careful to avert their eyes). Rusted chains and manacles hung suspended from the stones. Iron maidens, thumbscrews and racks lined the corridor. The bones of humans and subhumans were scattered about, and the place reeked with the smell of decayed flesh, the dankness and decay of a sagging castle. There was an unmistakable aura of death hanging over the place: It was most uncomfortable for me, so I could imagine what it was doing to Carolyn and Victoria.

I lit another wall torch. As the flame flared, I saw that the corridor we had been walking through came to an abrupt end. A large, metal-studded door stood closed directly in front of us. A tiny barred window was cut halfway up the door. The iron ring that served as a latch seemed rusted solid.

"The end of the line," Carolyn commented, crowding in on Victoria and me.

"Seems like it," I said. "Come on." I flashed my light on the rusted iron ring. "Let's see what's behind the door."

Victoria grabbed my arm. "No, John," she said in a tight little gasp.

I patted her hand again. "It's okay, darling. Just another room."

"It isn't," she said, her eyes suddenly large with

fright. "I feel there is something horrible behind that door."

"Nonsense," I said. "Come on, hold on to me."

Victoria hesitated for a moment. Then Carolyn nudged her and she went along, huddled in our little band.

My hand took hold of the rusty iron ring, and to my surprise I saw that the door was slightly ajar. I shouldered the massive panels and tried to inch the door open. It wouldn't budge; the hinges were rusted solid, as was the iron ring. I strained against the wood, exerted more strength, and finally, with a desperate shove, opened the door farther. The movement of the door, the screech of the hinges sent a scurry of bats flying over our heads. Victoria and Carolyn both screamed at the same time, and Carolyn covered her hair with her hands. The flying rodents disappeared down the corridor and up the stairs which we had just come down.

"Oh, dear," Carolyn said, panting her breath back to normal. "Those little monsters just flew up into the castle. They're most likely going to nest in our bedrooms."

"Thanks for the bright word," Victoria said, a note of friendly sarcasm in her voice.

I managed to inch the door open a little farther, just enough to squeeze around. I shone my flashlight around the walls, searching for a torch. There was one just inside the door. I took it down and struck a match to its tip. The flame sputtered and then rose. The light spread slowly through the room. I moved into the room with Victoria and Carolyn directly behind me.

Then Victoria gasped again and clutched at my arm. She pointed. There, sitting in the middle of the decaying old room, was a coffin.

Chapter 8

John Hamilton's Journal

Oct 9th.

The sight of a coffin was bad enough, but this coffin was open and there was a skeleton of a man lying in the dust of what once must have been his flesh. Victoria turned white. Strangely enough, Carolyn seemed fascinated.

I shined my light over the naked, dry old bones.

"Who do you think it is?" Carolyn asked, leaning forward and peering into the coffin.

"Oh, Carolyn," Victoria gasped. "Let's not look in that thing. I think I'm going to be ill."

Carolyn ignored her. "It's a man, there's no doubt about that from the bone structure," she said intelligently.

"Carolyn, please," Victoria moaned. Then she tugged at my arm. "John, let's get out of here. I really do feel a bit faint."

"Oh, Victoria," Carolyn huffed. "It's just an old coffin with some bones in it." Carolyn studied the skeleton for a moment longer and added, "He must have been a good-looking devil in his day."

"Carolyn," Victoria breathed, "I must insist."

"Relax, Victoria," I said, patting her hand gently. I didn't want to leave. I, like Carolyn, was a bit fascinated, not so much by the skeleton but by the length of wood that was lodged between the rib cage. "Can you hang on for a moment, Victoria," I asked. "I'd

like to see why that spear or stake or whatever it it is is resting between the ribs."

Carolyn, to my absolute surprise, chuckled. "It's not resting between his ribs, John," she said lightly. "It's a stake that was driven through the poor old dear's heart. See, it's sticking just about where his heart would be."

Victoria groaned.

I felt her sag more heavily against me.

"Nonsense," I said, flashing my light over the stake. "It looks more like a spear that was used to prop open the lid or something." But there was no hinged lid, I noticed. The lid was the sliding type, and it was resting on its side next to the box.

"John, please take me away," Victoria urged impatiently. She was clutching me tightly. "I can't stand to look at that thing. I think it is absolutely grotesque."

Carolyn gave her sister a displeased look. "Don't be such a scaredy cat, Victoria. It certainly can't do you any harm."

Carolyn's sharp admonition caused Victoria to bite down on her lip. I knew the mannerism well. It was a little thing Victoria always did. I'd seen her guilty of it time and time again. It meant she was angry with herself. I suspected that her annoyance had something to do with the fact that she was showing weakness in the face of Carolyn's show of strength.

Carolyn took a step closer to the casket. "Do you think it might be true?" she asked, half to herself and half to us.

"What?"

"That story about Drakula . . . his being a vampire and all."

"Oh, talk sense, Carolyn," I said sternly. "There are no such things as vampires. Surely you know that."

She was staring at the skeleton. If I hadn't known

better, I would have thought that she was purposely hypnotizing herself—or being hypnotized. There was a strange light in her eyes and her face was completely vacant of expression. She looked odd, very odd indeed.

"They killed vampires by driving stakes through their hearts, didn't they?" Carolyn said in a slow, even voice. She sounded as though she were talking through a heavy veil.

I felt Victoria shudder beside me, but she didn't say a word. I knew she was fighting to keep her courage.

"Nonsense," I said.

"If you think it such utter nonsense, John, why don't you pull out the stake and let us see what happens," Carolyn said in that hazy, dreamlike voice.

Victoria grabbed my arm. "No, John. Leave it alone. Let's go upstairs. This place is getting to me."

Carolyn chuckled softly. "There isn't anything to fear down here. Not while that stake is positioned through Drakula's heart."

"Carolyn, stop it," I said sharply. "You're upsetting Victoria."

"Victoria?" Carolyn said, still staring intently at the skeleton. Her voice changed; it didn't sound like her own. It was as if someone else was talking through Carolyn. "Is it Victoria you are afraid for, John, or are you afraid for yourself?"

"Afraid? Don't be absurd. What should I be afraid of? I've seen many a corpse and skeleton at the university. I've grown quite used to them and, believe me, I'm certainly not afraid of a dried up old skeleton like this one."

"Well, if you are not afraid, then pull out the stake. Pull it out, John," Carolyn urged. "I want to see if way down deep you don't really believe in the old superstition about vampires."

"You surprise me, Carolyn," I said, taking a step closer to the coffin and laying my hand on the stake. The wood felt smooth and warm despite its crudeness. It fit my hand perfectly. "You, of all people, should know that as a scientist, mythology and superstitions have no place in my life."

"Then pull out the stake, John," Carolyn said with a note of defiance.

"No," Victoria said, pulling my hand away. She scowled at Carolyn. "What's gotten into you, Carolyn. Let's get out of here right now. I have had just about enough of this silliness."

Carolyn laughed. "So you're the one who really believes the old myth about the stake rendering the vampire dead and harmless."

"If it pleases you to have me admit it, I will do so, Carolyn. However, the truth of the matter is that while I do not believe in vampires, I do believe one's last resting place should be left undefiled. I say leave the stake where it is and let's go upstairs."

I'm afraid I felt I had to side with Carolyn now. Victoria, I could see, really did believe in the old superstitions about vampires. That set my teeth on edge. I shook my head. I would just have to prove to her that that vampire nonsense could not be true. Victoria, for all her education and her levelheadedness, still had some pretty old-fashioned concepts. I couldn't believe it. Victoria was superstitious. I'd never known that before. There wasn't the least doubt about it. I could tell by taking one look at her that she really did suspect that this was the remains of the Drakula vampire and that the stake was keeping the vampire at bay. Now I'm a scientist both in mind and in body, and I just could not permit my wife to continue to harbor such a ridiculous notion. The only

way to disprove the myth about vampires was to pull out the stake and toss it aside.

Again my hand went around the hilt of the stake.

"No, John," Victoria pleaded. "Leave it alone, please." Her nails were digging into my arm.

"I'm merely doing this to show you how preposterous you are in believing that this bunch of old bones is the dead Count Drakula, the vampire of the Carpathian Mountains."

The stake was beginning to burn my hand. It was getting hotter and hotter. I felt I couldn't hold on to it much longer. Before I was conscious of what I was doing, I found I had yanked the stake out with a quick jerk. At that precise moment, I think my ears deceived me. I thought I heard a man groan, as though with pain or pleasure. It was a odd sound, but I suppose it was merely the stake scraping against the bone, causing a vibration.

The stake cooled the moment I pulled it out of the skeleton. It turned ice cold. I tossed it aside.

The minute it hit the floor I saw Carolyn sag, as though someone had lifted a great weight from her shoulders. Victoria noticed it too.

"Carolyn," she said anxiously, and went to her.

Carolyn passed her hand over her eyes. "I felt faint for a moment," she said weakly.

"Of course you did," Victoria said. She gave me a hard look. "Take us upstairs, John. We've had enough of this." She looked with distaste at the coffin.

I shrugged. I nodded toward the skeleton. "I just wanted you to see that this hocus-pocus about vampires is just that—hocus-pocus. See, the skeleton isn't turning back into a human," I said with a laugh. Yet there was something about the dry collection of bones that disturbed me. They looked different somehow—younger, newer. Without knowing why, I lifted the

heavy lid and slid it over the coffin. Once the skeleton was covered, I felt a little better.

"All right," I said, "I think we've had enough for the time being. I'll come back down tomorrow during the daylight." I laughed. "Vampires sleep during the day, so the count won't be able to hurt me."

"John, don't talk like that! It makes me shiver just to think about that old skeleton with the stake through its heart," Victoria said as we retraced our steps.

I left the door to the room open. I could see no earthly reason to close it. One by one we extinguished the wall torches as we went back along the cold, clammy corridor.

Carolyn, I noticed, was extremely quiet.

Stefen Petrof gave us a suspicious look when we came back up the stairs. We passed through without a word. Olga pushed the door to the cellar shut and turned the key after us. There was, I thought, a look of fear in her face.

My suspicion of Olga's fear was confirmed when we were sitting around the library area watching the Petrofs prepare the dining table. I happened to mention the skeleton and stake to Carolyn again and asked her why she had behaved so strangely. At the mention of the stake and skeleton, Olga dropped a handful of gold dinner plates. They went clattering down onto the slab floor. Her husband said something to her in a language I did not understand, and Olga scurried away. She didn't reappear at all that night.

How odd it is that Carolyn is so vague about her behavior down in the cellar. She barely remembers seeing the skeleton, the coffin, and the stake. She remembers none of her taunts about my being superstitious or her goading me to remove the wooden stake. Although Carolyn is, I must admit, a

bit scatterbrained, nevertheless she does have an extremely keen memory. It is most unusual for her not to remember something as mind boggling as an open coffin containing the remains of a human being. I know I for one will never forget it, and I am certain Victoria will not. Despite what I told Victoria and Carolyn, even though I had seen a few skeletons in my day, this particular one was quite awesome—no, not awesome, frightening. There was something very ominous about it.

Carolyn made a very morbid comment. She said the skeleton reminded her of Walter. What a strange thing to say. I'm glad Victoria was out of the room and didn't hear the remark. I'm sure she would not have appreciated Carolyn's saying such a thing. I know how highly Victoria regards Walter. I think she looks upon him as a brother-in-law already. She certainly would not like to hear Carolyn refer to Walter as someone dead and gone.

"What was that?" Carolyn asked suddenly, sitting straight up in her chair. She was looking toward the windows.

"What was what?"

"I thought I heard someone moaning." She settled back. "The wind, I suppose, or perhaps our friends the wolves are back."

"Very likely," I said, noticing that Petrof had finished setting out our meal. I went over to the table. "Not paprika hendle again," I groaned. Petrof gave me an angry look. I immediately looked sheepish. "It's just that we have had it every single day since we got to your country," I told him.

"It is our national dish," he answered curtly. He slammed down the platter he was holding and abruptly left the room.

Carolyn and I exchanged guilty glances.

"I guess you goofed," Carolyn said.

I shrugged. "I must admit I'm a little sick and tired of paprika hendle. If they only knew what it does to my stomach. It keeps me up at night."

Carolyn laughed.

Victoria came into the room just at the tail end of our conversation. "You must be talking about their national dish," she said, noticing the dinner. "I thought so. It gives John nightmares, I'm afraid." As we seated ourselves at the table, Victoria leaned over and touched my hand. "Eat lightly, John. Perhaps it won't upset you as much if you eat small portions."

"And starve?" I asked, helping myself to the dish.

"Which is the worse of two evils?" Carolyn said.

I merely groaned and began eating. I was famished.

A soft, low moaning started just outside. The three of us put down our forks at precisely the same moment and stared at each other. It wasn't wolves; not this moan. It was too human sounding.

"I'll go see," I said, and I pushed back my chair.

"John, be careful," Victoria called after me.

"Of what?" I asked over my shoulder. "They can't get in," I added, "Unless whoever it is has wings and can fly up the side of the castle." I opened the casement window. Bars covered the outside frame. "And through iron bars," I added, examining them.

Down below, the courtyard was clear and still. There were no wolves, and there were no humans in sight. Then I saw something black glide silently from a tower window. It was some huge bird, I thought. A hawk or an eagle, perhaps. Did they have hawks and eagles in the Carpathians? I made a mental note to research that.

"Nothing," I said, looking again toward the woods and beyond. "It must have been the wind."

"There isn't any wind," Carolyn commented balefully.

"Whatever it was, it's gone now." Suddenly I hesitated. I saw something down at the edge of the woods. A dark figure seemed to materialize from nowhere. It was a man—a man dressed all in black. His face was white as death. He was looking up toward the window in which I was framed. "A man," I said haltingly. I heard both Carolyn and Victoria get up from the table and come to stand beside me.

"Where?" Victoria asked. She peered over my shoulder.

"There, near the edge of the wood." I pointed.

"I don't see anyone," Victoria said.

Carolyn said nothing.

And then the figure was gone. It vanished as quickly as it had appeared. It all happened so quickly I had the distinct impression that I might have imagined the whole incident. I said so to Victoria.

Carolyn just stood there, staring toward the woods.

"Petrof, possibly," Victoria said. She left the window and resumed her seat at the table.

"Possibly," I said. I joined her. Carolyn stood at the window staring out at nothing. Then the low moan was heard again, and Carolyn shivered visibly.

"Close the window, Carolyn," Victoria said. "You'll catch cold."

Carolyn obeyed without a word.

When she had joined us at the table, I asked, "Did *you* see anything out there?"

"See anything?" she said, helping herself to more paprika hendle.

"Yes, outside?"

"Outside? No. I saw nothing."

She wasn't telling the truth. She had seen something. I could tell by the look in her eye that she had

seen something and didn't want to admit it. But what? What could Carolyn possibly wish to hide from us?

I was letting my imagination get the better of me.

Later—

I can't help but think of Carolyn's strange behavior during the past few hours.

And who was that strange figure I saw at the edge of the woods during dinner? I'm afraid all thoughts of earthquake causation and prevention have been swept out of my head for the moment. The place is taking on a whole new atmosphere for me. I can't associate science and Castle Drakula. They seem worlds apart.

Ridiculous! I'm letting my imagination get the better of me.

I see Victoria is finally sleeping soundly. She tried to sleep earlier but complained that she was either overtired or not tired enough; she couldn't decide. We went to bed at a respectable hour, but after a time in bed we both decided we had slept too long during the day and therefore couldn't sleep now. Strange how our sleeping habits have taken on an entirely new and different schedule. It seems that we are destined to stay up at night and sleep during the day.

The dawn will be up shortly. How quiet and lovely it is here at this hour of the morning. I'm reminded of the Wolf's Glen in *Der Freischutz*—desolate yet beautiful. Trees struggle up from between rocks; ghostly moonlight floods the scene. I can almost hear the voices of invisible spirits chanting away to Caspar as he arranges his circle of black stones about the skull and readies himself for the appearance of the Black Huntsman, Satan himself.

I just heard the howling of wolves again. The woods are saturated with them, I suppose.

Sitting at this desk, staring out into the mist, I can almost make out shapes of things and people.

Hold on! It can't be true! I'm imagining it! No, they are there, all right. They're down there in the trees. They're coming toward the castle. Three, no four—four women, dressed all in white. They are walking through the mist, walking directly toward Castle Drakula. These must be the same women Victoria said she saw on the road. What in the world are they doing walking about out there in the cold? Surely they'll freeze themselves to death.

They've left the woods now and are advancing into the courtyard. They're coming toward me. They're coming here—to Castle Drakula!

No, wait. They're gone! They've vanished. I can't see them anywhere. Oh, this is ridiculous. They must be out there somewhere.

I just returned from downstairs. I can't understand any of it. I was too curious to ignore four women in white prowling around the courtyard and then disappearing into the air, so I went down to investigate. I'd better learn to stay inside at night around here. Just as I opened the front door and stepped into the courtyard, a pack of wolves started to advance on me from the woods. From the brief look I had around, I saw no signs of the strange women. Like Victoria, I must have imagined them. The mist was obviously playing tricks on me. But those wolves were real enough. Damn, but they have fierce, evil eyes. I hope they never get any closer to me than they were tonight.

Strange. . . . Now that I think of it, the eyes on those ugly wolves had the same mysterious glint to them as did the women's, the women in the fog.

John, old man, go to bed. You'll be imagining ghosts next.

Chapter 9

Letter from Miss Carolyn Stuart to Mr. Walter Bradshaw, Los Angeles, California, U. S. A.

October 9th
Dear Walter,

I suppose you'll think me strange to be writing you before posting my last letter, but the truth of the matter is that you will more than likely receive several letters from me at the same time. It never occurred to me that I would have no way of posting my letters from here. We must wait for a postal wagon, and they come only every week or so.

There is little to write about, except that I miss you.

John and Victoria are being very romantic. I suppose that is why I wanted to write you again so soon.

We had a very unusual happening today. We found a coffin in one of the rooms beneath the castle. It was just sitting there in the middle of the room with a skeleton inside it. You're not going to believe this, but there was a wooden stake driven through the rib cage where its heart would have been. Imagine! Just like in the old Bela what's-his-name movies. A real skeleton and a real stake. Do you think I'll come face to face with my first live vampire? Isn't it just too exciting?

Speaking of that skeleton, I have a question to ask. Do you believe in ESP and mental telepathy and stuff like that? Were you thinking of me real hard this afternoon? When I was standing over that skeleton (now don't laugh), I swear it took on flesh and blood

and it was YOU lying there. Oh, you weren't dead or anything. You were just lying there. I was fascinated by you. Of course, if you want a girlish confession, I've been fascinated with you ever since I met you. But I am sure you guessed that a long time ago, right?

But to get back to my old skeleton—don't you think it odd that it would change into you right before my eyes? I wonder if it means anything. Maybe it means I want you dead. NO! That's a joke, Walter. I'm only kidding, really I am.

I don't think I'll mail this letter. It's coming out sounding all wrong. It wasn't terrible to see you lying in that coffin. It gave me a kind of thrill. Am I being crazy? I mean it, Walter. I got goose pimply all over. It was a very wonderful sensation, like you were going to stand up at any minute and take me in your arms. Oh, I can't explain it. Believe me, though, I liked it—I liked it very much.

I'd better change the subject before you decide to send the little men in the white coats after me.

No, I don't want to see you lying in a coffin. That's not the way I get my kicks. Don't ask me to explain how I felt, I can't.

John's seeing things too. He saw some man standing beneath the window during dinner. I think I saw him too, but I'm not sure. It was all very vague and foggy when I looked out. Victoria didn't see anything.

Poor Victoria. She's really unnerved by this place. At least she's getting a night's sleep, which is more than I can say for John and myself. But I guess I really should force myself to fall asleep.

I'll write again soon.

Love as usual,
Carolyn

P. S. Stay out of drafty basements and old wooden coffins.

Chapter 10

John Hamilton's Journal

October 9th (Evening)

I don't think I will tell Victoria and Carolyn about the Petrofs. It would only serve to upset them unduly since Victoria and Carolyn both seem to be convinced that this Drakula legend has some basis in fact. Why sane, educated people still hold fast to ancient superstition is beyond my comprehension. Everyone knows that there is no such thing as a vampire. It's a physical impossibility, and yet Victoria is convinced that the skeleton in the cellar is that of a vampire, and she also confessed to me that she is certain I released the vampire from its prison of death when I removed the stake from its heart.

Carolyn laughs and treats the whole thing very lightly, but I know she too believes that that pile of bones was a vampire. She baffles me. She almost seems happy about the whole thing. She acts as though she is looking forward to meeting this so-called vampire; "If one exists," she said, but I know Carolyn is much like Victoria. Down deep she truly believes in the old superstition—or wants to.

So I will not tell them about the Petrofs. It would only add fuel to their fire.

Stefen and Olga came to me earlier. They are leaving the castle. They were most apologetic about it all and begged that I take my family and leave with

them. Actually I think it is some kind of ruse to get me out of Castle Drakula. I believe it to be some political ploy. Perhaps they think I will back down on my earthquake investigation project, thereby giving the communists reason to complain about America's reluctance and/or refusal to help their scientific programs.

I let the Petrofs go and turned a deaf ear to their jabberings about seeing a huge bat which tried to drain them of their blood. It's beyond my understanding how people can allow their imaginations to run so wild. Certainly they didn't hope that I would believe that ridiculous tale? First of all, if they did see a vampire bat (which I doubt very much, inasmuch as vampire bats dislike cold climates) it was *not* huge. Vampire bats are only three inches long when fully grown. Secondly, if they were attacked, the only possible harm the bat could do them could be to infect them with rabies—of which I warned them. The bat could not possibly have drained them of practically all of their blood. That is a physical impossibility for so small a mammal. And finally once bitten by a vampire bat, one does not take on vampire bat tendencies. How absurd!

But they would not listen to logic or reason. They were convinced that they were set upon by a gigantic vampire monster. Olga kept sobbing and blessing herself, and Stefen kept begging me to pack up and leave before it was too late. It was quite a scene and a definite change from the dour, cold-eyed communists who greeted us when we arrived at this infernal place.

So I let them go. What else could I do? But, as I said, I think I will keep still about their reason for leaving and pretend that they merely abandoned us.

More strange happenings.

About five minutes after I saw the Petrofs start off

on foot, a stranger came pounding on the door. I left Victoria and Carolyn in the sitting room and went to answer the knocking. We have a new host. He is to replace Skinsky. He is Count Drakula, a descendant of the one who built this castle. I was most flattered that he had heard of my reputation and of my coming to Rumania. This being his homeland and as he was interested in my work, the government saw fit to contact him and send him home to his castle so that he could be of assistance to us. His knowledge of the castle should prove invaluable.

I told him about the Petrofs and about their unbelievable story. I asked him if he would favor me by not mentioning their tale to my wife and Carolyn. He gave me his promise, which I thought most gentlemanly of him.

He wasn't too concerned about the Petrofs leaving. He said he would see that domestic help was procured. I haven't the slightest idea where he intends finding help here in this desolate region, but he assured me that it would be taken care of.

I took him upstairs and introduced him to Victoria and Carolyn. Although he is most flattering to me and my work, I feel I dislike the man. He unnerves me by the way he looks at us, especially at Carolyn.

Chapter 11

Victoria Hamilton's Diary

October 10th

This place gets stranger and stranger with every passing day. John told me the Petrofs are gone. Gone! Just like that. None of us even heard them drive off during the night. But we are not without help. A strange entourage attended us at breakfast (served about seven o'clock at night). A man has come to replace Skinsky, and with him is a group of serving women. There are four women. They are the same four women I saw in the road the night we arrived here. I'd swear to it. They are, according to the count, local women who have consented to work for us during the evenings. It seems they have their own families to attend to during the day.

The count. . . . I must mention him. He's the strangest of the lot. His name, believe it or not, is Drakula, and he's a direct descendant of the Drakula who built this dilapidated castle. He says he has been out of the country for several years and knew nothing about our being housed here until his government advised him. He seems delighted to have us in his ancestral home. Personally, I think he knew we were coming here right from the beginning. I have the feeling he's just another agent for the People's Republic.

Carolyn finds him very attractive. He is far from being my type of man. He has an extremely strong

face—aquiline, with a high-bridged nose that has unusually arched nostrils. He has a lofty, domed forehead and hair growing scantily at the temples but profusely elsewhere. John said it is a very intellectual skull—a bit like Einstein's. His eyebrows are quite massive and almost meet over the nose. I remember my mother once told me that when eyebrows meet it means the person is extremely conceited. I have a feeling she might be right insofar as Count Drakula is concerned. He is very fond of himself; at least he gives that impression. As I said, Carolyn is smitten with him. I can't for the life of me see why. I find him most unattractive. She thinks the count resembles Walter Bradshaw. I find no physical resemblance whatsoever. The only thing they have in common is a mustache, but Walter's is very neat and tidy, whereas Count Drakula's is heavy and has a rather cruel look to it; but perhaps it is the sharp white teeth and the thin lips that make it seem cruel.

For the rest—his eyes are pale, his chin is broad and strong. His ears seem to come to a point and his cheeks are firm though thin. The general effect was, to me, one of extraordinary pallor.

John tells me the man actually repulses him. I can't go so far as to say that, but there is definitely something disquieting about Count Drakula. Perhaps it is the fact that his name automatically conjures up unpleasant thoughts. He himself has complained about how America's motion pictures exploited his family name and reduced it to salaciousness. John was quick to point out, however, that Mr. Bram Stoker was English, not American. Stoker was the one who authored the Drakula legend. The American movie makers merely satisfied public interest.

Count Drakula, for all his seeming dislike of America, has indicated an interest in closing down his

old, drafty castle and taking up residence in California. This sounded a bit confusing to us inasmuch as we were led to understand that the castle was the property of his government and not his to do with as he saw fit. Nevertheless, he enjoys talking at length with us about our home town. He has even hinted about his renting our California home while we stay on here. John wouldn't hear of it, of course. I think he truly dislikes and distrusts the man. Who can blame him?

Carolyn believes we are both being unfair toward Count Drakula. Truthfully, I am of the impression that the only attraction the count holds for Carolyn is his title. She has never met royalty before. And Carolyn has always been the impressionable type. But I'm certain that once she is back with Walter in Los Angeles she will forget all about this gloomy old castle and its strange Count Drakula.

He does have exceedingly charming manners, however. Nothing seems to be an imposition. He seems willing to do just about anything to make us comfortable and content. And, I must admit, he is a most interesting conversationalist.

We had just finished eating when the count joined us.

"You will forgive me for not having dined with you," he apologized, "but my stomach is most delicate and requires the blandest of foods. I eat very lightly and very rarely."

"You need a wife to look after you," Carolyn made bold to say.

I felt embarrassed at her brusqueness, as did John, but the count beamed at her and took her hand.

"If I could find a wife as lovely and as charming as you, my dear Carolyn, I would be willing to settle down and bid adieu to my bachelor days forever." He

looked toward John. "You American men do not realize how fortunate you are in having such beauty surrounding you. European women generally let themselves get obese once they marry." Now he looked in my direction, and added, "But American women seem to become more beautiful as the years of married life pass."

He is a charmer, I must admit.

"We came across one of your ancestors," Carolyn blurted out.

"Oh? And whom, may I ask, did you meet, my dear? the count asked laughingly.

Carolyn shrugged. She told him about the skeleton and the stake.

Again the count laughed. "One of my forefathers, no doubt. My family had a strange habit of refusing to inter the dead in a crypt or mausoleum. They generally sealed up the dead in rooms beneath the castle. It was an old, old custom to do so. Frankly, I approve of it even though it is out of step with modern notions and ideas. But we old Transylvanian nobles do not like to think that our bones will someday lie among the common dead."

"*Les droits du roi,*" John muttered sarcastically.

The count gave him a withering look.

Carolyn gave John a frosty look. She turned her attention to the count. "But how do you explain that stake through the heart?" she asked.

The count merely spread his hands. "Some prank, more than likely. This old castle has been empty for many years. There are some travelers—tourists—who come here occasionally. They no doubt read the legend of the Drakula vampire—especially if they were American tourists," he added, casting an accusing look at John. "They most likely decided to add some dra-

matics to the tale after they found my forefather's coffin. I am sure it is simply a 'scare tactic' as they say in your country."

"They succeeded nicely," I said. I shuddered. "At least as far as I am concerned."

The count chuckled then turned to John. "But enough of me, tell me about your work Dr. Hamilton."

"There isn't much to tell, really," John said. He explained briefly about the mountains and the importance they may play in earthquake prevention. The count seemed completely absorbed in everything John said.

"Then you believe there is a possibility that this castle may someday be destroyed by an earthquake, buried under tons upon tons of rocks and dirt—swallowed up by the mountains?"

John nodded. "It is more than just possible, Count Drakula. From the reports received by my government, there is a very good likelihood that this region may well be the center of a major earthquake. When that quake will occur we cannot say, at least not at present. That is the reason I am here. The quake will come, there is little doubt of that. I mean to study the earth's crust, the various geological features of the vicinity, in order to determine the time such earth movement will happen."

"You say 'will happen'," the count said. "Then you believe it is a certainty that an earthquake will level this castle."

Again John nodded, this time a bit more gravely than before. "I'm afraid we cannot be one hundred percent certain," he said, "but there is every indication that we can be at least ninety or ninety-five percent certain. There is hardly a doubt in our minds that this

castle will be destroyed by earthquake within the next quarter century, if not sooner."

The count looked extremely worried and concerned. "I had no idea you scientist fellows could be so accurate." He sat looking grave and dejected. Then he brightened and slapped his hands on his knees and stood up. "But this old place has seen enough days of life. It is time for it to go back into the earth from which it was built. My family will not have need of it."

I frowned. His family? I didn't understand and was quick to ask.

"Oh, I fear that was a misguided slip, my dear. I have no family. I was referring to those dead and gone. When one becomes the last surviving member of an old and respected family, one tends to look upon the dead as still having life and the living as being dead. I trust you understand." He smiled at me, and his sharp white teeth glistened in the light of the fire.

"Yes, of course," I said, but I truthfully did not understand. To me the dead are dead and the living are living and there is no middle ground.

"But tell me all you can about America," the count said. "Perhaps I would like to go there some day. I hear it is very beautiful, especially your West Coast."

"That's where we are from," Carolyn said. "California."

I saw John frown. "But I thought you said you traveled extensively, count." He gave him a suspicious look. "Surely you have journeyed to America?"

"Unfortunately no. I have traveled extensively, yes, but perhaps not as extensively as I would wish to travel. My sojourns have always confined themselves to the boundaries of Europe and the Far East. I have never sailed to such a distant country as your America."

"Sailing takes too long," Carolyn put in. "We sailed over only because of Victoria's fear of heights. I plan on flying back. No more ships for me."

"Flying? I'm afraid I don't understand," the count said. He looked genuinely surprised and confused.

"Sure. The airplanes only take hours instead of days."

"Of course, of course. The airplanes," the count said, but I could easily see he was baffled. Perhaps he hadn't traveled as much as he professed to, I thought. Something told me that he hadn't traveled much at all. I studied his pallor, his physique, his expression. Suddenly everything seemed to become crystal clear to me. Our Count Drakula had possibly been confined in some communist prison and only recently was released because he had consented to spy on us. He had the same pale, anemic color of a prisoner. He was underweight, had obviously lacked for food. He'd been locked up for a very long time. Perhaps that might explain his lack of knowledge of flying and airplanes.

First Skinsky, then the Petrofs, and now a Count Drakula. Really, the place is crawling with communists. I wonder if he really is a count, let alone a descendant of the Drakula family. I suspect he is nothing more than a communist impostor.

"It is warm in your California, yes?" he asked.

"Quite warm," John answered.

"And your house there, it is a new house?"

I laughed. "Hardly. John dislikes new houses. No, our home is a big, old thing. It dates back to early Spanish times. We have had it remodeled, of course; some modern facilities added, but the house itself is an antique."

"Good, good. I am glad your house is old and big. I myself am from a very old family, and I think if I had to live in a new house it would be the death of me. It

seems to me that a house cannot be made habitable let alone livable in one day. After all, there are but a few days in a century, true? Although I do not seek gaiety and mirth and am not eager for the bright voluptuousness of youth, I am very interested in seeing your young and warm and beautiful California. Perhaps we should exchange houses," he said with a broad grin. "You could stay and work here in my family's castle, and I could reside in your lovely, old California home." He laughed, but I got the distinct impression that he was serious. I think John sensed it too because he gave the count a strange, wary look. I believe the count saw it because his expression turned grave suddenly, then he smiled again and pretended not to notice John's cold reception of his suggestion.

"Speaking of old houses," John said, changing the subject tactfully, "this castle, I've noticed that many of the rooms are locked or inaccessible. The Petrofs say there are no keys to the doors. Is that true?"

"Possibly. The castle has been empty for a long time. If there are keys, they would more than likely be kept in the pantry area off the kitchens. At least that is where the housekeepers once kept all the keys. But I would not suggest you roam about too freely. If the rooms are locked, they are locked for a purpose. The floors are most likely sagging and in danger of collapse, or possibly the ceilings have fallen. I would advise you to feel free to go anywhere you please in the castle, but confine your wanderings only to those areas which are accessible to you."

There was a scuffling sound in the corridor. We all turned toward the door as we heard it creak open. Standing there were four women all dressed in white.

John unconsciously rose to his feet. The glass he had been holding slipped from his shaking fingers and shattered on the floor.

The count paid no attention to the broken glass. He motioned for John to reseat himself. "The serving women," he said casually. "I told you I would employ them for your domestic duties, did I not?" he said.

"But, but . . ." John could only stammer. When he had regained his composure, he looked at the count. "I don't understand," John said. "You were to arrange for help in view of the Petrofs' departure. But you have been here with us since you arrived. How could you have known we needed help."

The count did not answer. The answer came from the women standing in the doorway.

"We were sent by the Petrofs," one of them said.

"Olga told us of your needs."

"We are more than happy to work at night."

"The daytime we must devote elsewhere."

The count motioned toward the table and the women, without another word, set to work.

"But they are the women you saw on the road the other night," John said to me.

"It is possible," the count interjected. "They live in the vicinity. It was they whom I meant to contact tomorrow, but I see the Petrofs have saved me that trouble."

"But how could they?" John started. "They told me. . . ." He interrupted himself, giving Carolyn and me a guilty look. Whatever he was going to say he obviously changed his mind and did not say it.

"We should be thankful for small favors," Carolyn said. "Personally, I prefer this lot to that surly Petrof and his gloomy wife."

I had to smile, noticing the blank expressions of the women, who walked as though they were dead on their feet. It was obvious they needed the money, or perhaps they were forced to work for the People's Republic whether they liked it or not.

"These aren't much happier looking," I said to Carolyn. I turned to John. "And offhand, darling, I would say they are the same women I saw on the road."

"And I saw them in the woods last night, after you fell asleep," John answered.

The count got suddenly to his feet. "Well, I must be about the business of getting myself settled. If you will excuse me." He bowed and started out. He stopped halfway and looked toward the serving women. He motioned with his eyes, and the four women stopped what they were doing and followed him out of the room.

"That's odd," John said, deep in thought.

"What, darling?"

"Count Drakula, or whatever his name is. He didn't have any luggage, and he didn't come by cart or wagon or any other kind of vehicle. He just showed up."

"You can't be sure of that," Carolyn said. "You didn't see him drive up. Perhaps the cart dropped him and his luggage off before he started knocking on the door."

"Perhaps," John said, rubbing his chin. "Still, I don't like the looks of that guy."

"Neither do I," I said, unconsciously fingering the crucifix that I had pulled from its hiding place amidst the folds of my blouse. I had almost forgotten the crucifix that the old woman in the inn had insisted I take with me to Castle Drakula. For some reason or other, I found solace in the touch of it. I honestly could not tell whether it was the four strange women who unnerved me or the count himself. A combination of them, I told myself.

Carolyn got to her feet. She gave us an exasperated look. "Perhaps you two are getting too old to appre-

ciate the finer things in life," she said. "I think the count is quite sophisticated and rather 'dreamy'." She hugged herself.

"Oh dear," John sighed. We exchanged glances. We knew when Carolyn was building up to one of her moods. "She's being adolescent again," our eyes told each other.

Chapter 12

John Hamilton's Journal

October 12th

I've started serious work on the geology report for the International Geophysical Society. I see I've let two days elapse since writing in this journal. My reports to I.G.S. have taken precedent over this personal account of my travels and affairs.

This place is much more desolate than I thought, and yet I've not journeyed too far from the castle. The terrain is impossible. Every fragment of information is obtained only through a great deal of work and sweat. The mountains and landscape are very reluctant to part with their secrets.

We are still sleeping late in the day. Possibly this is what is causing the work to go so slowly. I must make a concerted effort to get to bed earlier and start work in the morning hours when the light is at its best.

I haven't gone back to the cellars. I've been spending my time out-of-doors. However, once the light fails I am forced to stop. The wolves are an ever present danger after dark.

I wish our party had arrived during the daytime hours. Possibly we would not have fallen into this habit of sleeping during the day and staying up until dawn. It is a most unnatural schedule for us, and I see that it is beginning to take its toll on Carolyn and Victoria. Carolyn especially looks drawn and pale these

past few days. Obviously it's from lack of sunshine. Victoria looks tired, but her color is still good—not like Carolyn's. I really should think of sending them away. This place is not good for them, and the count and his strange flock of women don't help matters.

Speaking of Count Drakula, he is forever underfoot it seems. He follows me everywhere. He, like the rest of us, has adopted the habit of sleeping during the day and staying up until dawn. He blames his schedule on the fact that he enjoys being waited upon and the serving women are only available during the night. When do they sleep? Surely they don't leave here at dawn and go directly home to work for their families. They must sleep some time, but when? I've questioned the count on this, and he merely remarked that they manage and told me not to concern myself about the lot of the peasants. He really is a snob I fear.

At first I was flattered by his interest in my work, but now I find it is rapidly becoming tedious to have him constantly at my elbow. He watches my every move with avid interest.

I wonder where he is now? I've gotten up a little earlier than usual, but not much earlier. Since the count arrived he has been here in the sitting room waiting for us when we arise, but today he is nowhere to be found. Actually I'm rather grateful that he isn't peering over my shoulder.

Oh dear, I spoke too soon. He just came into the room. I'll put this aside and begin shaving. I would prefer he did not see this journal.

"More reports, doctor?" Count Drakula commented as I slipped the journal back into its drawer. I turned the tiny key and dropped it into my pocket. The count chuckled. "Have no fears of my reading your papers, my friend," he said. "Although I speak

English fluently, unfortunately I am unable to read it."

He's lying. I've seen him studying some of the English books in the library.

I chose not to answer him. I went into the bedroom and saw that Victoria was still sleeping. Rather than chance disturbing her with my shaving, I carried my gear back into the sitting room and chose a niche in the dining alcove where the light was particularly good. I set up my little traveling mirror and poured some hot water into my shaving mug. The count, I noticed was busying himself with the table. He was not, at the moment, noticing my actions.

"I'm sorry I was not here when you awoke," the count said, not bothering to glance in my direction. "I usually have business to attend to during the day," he said. "If I awake early I very often leave the castle."

"We've gotten to be night people," I commented as I made ready the lather. "I wish we had arrived during the day. I'm afraid our schedule is terribly off kilter."

"I prefer your schedule as it is," the count answered. "I would not particularly mind if you continued on it."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," I said. "I must start getting up earlier. I can't carry on with my work at night. I need daylight to see what I'm doing."

"We will work by the light of the torches," the count said, setting plates around the table. "And torches will keep the wolves away."

I could not get a clear glimpse of myself with the mirror propped as it was on the ledge. I moved it, hanging it from the window latch.

"How long will your work take, doctor?"

"Not more than a few months," I said, glancing in

the mirror. I froze. I stood there, staring in the glass, amazed by the fact that I could not see the count. The reflection of the glass covered the whole of the room behind me. I saw the table, I saw the chairs, the library area, the fireplace—but I did not see Count Drakula! Impossible, I thought as I whirled around. In so doing, I accidentally nicked myself on the chin. When I turned, I saw the count perfectly clearly. He was standing beside the chair at the head of the table. Quickly I looked back into the mirror. I saw the chair at the head of the table but there was no one standing beside it. There was no reflection of Count Drakula in the glass. The whole room behind me was on display, but there was no sign of the count. I saw no face except my own.

I stood there, startled beyond comprehension. This, coming so soon after so many other strange happenings, was beginning to increase that feeling of dread I had acquired whenever I found myself near Count Drakula. But my thoughts were quickly pushed aside when I noticed the cut on my chin and the fact that I was bleeding quite profusely. The blood ran in a tiny river down over my chin, dripping onto my dressing gown.

I put down my razor. As I did so, I turned half around to look in my shaving kit for a styptic pencil.

The count looked at me. His eyes widened; they blazed with a sort of satanic fury. Then suddenly he rushed at me and grabbed me. I drew away, too taken aback to speak. I felt genuinely afraid of him. The look in his eyes was horrible. I thought he was going to strike me, not that I feared him physically. I was much the stronger than he. But it was as though some demonic force was crouching over me. I actually cowered, crossing my arms before my face. I didn't immediately notice the shadow my crossed arms made

against the opposite wall, but the count noticed. It caused an immediate change in him. His fury passed as quickly as it had come. In fact, it passed so quickly that I could hardly believe it had been there at all.

"Take care," he said, his voice shaking and threatening, his eyes growing dull and pale again. "Take care how you cut yourself, my friend. It is more dangerous than you think in this country. You are not in your modern America where everything is sterilized and spotless. You might well infect yourself and find no cure. This is Rumania. We are a very backward lot here."

Then his eyes moved to my shaving mirror. He reached out and pulled it from its hanging. "And this is the evil thing that has done the damage. It is a foul plaything of man's vanity. Away with it." And so saying, he threw open the heavy casement window with one wrench of his bony hand and flung the glass out into the courtyard. A moment later, I heard it shatter into a hundred pieces on the stones far below.

I was speechless. He was like a maniac.

He slammed shut the window and, without a word, withdrew from the room.

I just stood there dumb with surprise. The man's a raving lunatic, I told myself. A raving maniac.

The lather on my face was beginning to dry. I felt it contracting my skin. I felt annoyed, to say the least, for the light had faded, and I could not see now to finish shaving. And on top of that, I would have to resort to using the bottom of my silver shaving mug or possibly the back of my watchcase for future shaves. Yes, I felt most annoyed, to say the least.

I noticed that the count had finished preparing breakfast before he stormed out. I ate alone, expecting Victoria or Carolyn to show up at any time. They did not; neither one of them. As I ate, I thought about the

count and his peculiar behavior. There was no accounting for it. The only answer I could come up with was that the man must be mad. The answer convinced me of one thing, however. I would have to send Carolyn and Victoria back to America. They could not stay here with some mentally deranged communist nobleman. Even if the man is not insane, I thought, he still represents some sort of strange evil which I feel is not a comfortable exposure for Victoria and Carolyn.

Besides, I've noticed that Carolyn is becoming entirely too friendly with the count. No good will come of it, I fear. She may think she is merely flirting with him, but I can see the look in the count's eyes whenever Carolyn is near. He is not merely returning her flirtatious glances, he is truly interested in Carolyn. I'd bet my soul on it.

"John," Victoria said sleepily, coming into the sitting room. "You're up early."

I was sipping their so-called coffee. "I'm going to make a desperate try at getting up at dawn instead of getting to bed at dawn. I simply must get more work done. I've accomplished so little since we've been here."

"But we've only been here a few days, John. I think you've done quite well in getting those dispatches off in so short a time."

"They were purely preliminary reports. I knew the post wagon would be coming through so I wrote the I.G.S., but actually I told them nothing because I have nothing to tell."

"And I suppose we are no help," Victoria said. "I wish we could be though."

I went to her and kissed her temple. "You're a great help just being here," I told her, but I didn't mean it. I

felt suddenly deceitful in saying what I had. I decided I'd better be honest.

"Victoria," I started, "I've been thinking."

"Yes, John."

"What would you say if I were to send you and Carolyn back home."

Victoria threw down the napkin she'd just picked up. "John, no. You can't stay here all alone. Why you just got done saying. . . ."

"I know, I know," I said, waving her off.

Victoria would not be stilled. "You just cannot stay here alone, John."

"I wouldn't be alone. The count is here."

I saw Victoria grimace. "A lot of consolation that is," she said.

"I grant you it is very little consolation," I agreed, "but at least he is company. He breaks the boredom of the place, and you can't tell me this place isn't boring," I added, shaking an accusing finger at her.

Victoria grinned. "Well it isn't the most exciting time I've ever spent," she admitted, "but at least we have each other. Though we really haven't had too much time together of late. Personally, I'm enjoying it."

"Enjoying what?" Carolyn asked, as she joined Victoria and me at the table. Carolyn, I noticed, looked even paler than she had yesterday. She had lost the bright sparkle she had been exhibiting lately (which I took to be for the count's benefit). I had to admit it. Carolyn looked very bad—actually ill.

"John thinks we should be sent packing," Victoria said. She discreetly lowered her eyes from Carolyn's so that her sister would not see the look of shock on Victoria's face when she noticed the change for the worse in her.

Carolyn froze. "No," she said firmly.

She spoke so seriously that both Victoria and I stared at her in spite of ourselves. It was as though she had just delivered a decree.

Victoria resumed eating, trying to act calm. "That's what I said. I know it's dull around here but the rest is doing us a world of good."

"Is it?" I asked caustically, glancing at Carolyn. Victoria got my meaning. She could not have helped noticing the change in Carolyn's looks. I began to fidget. "I think I've made a big mistake in bringing you two here," I said. "My work will keep me occupied too much of the time. You two will be left to fend for yourselves. Carolyn won't be able to help me. The work is too arduous, I find. Truthfully and in all seriousness, I believe you two should think about packing up and going back."

"I am *not* leaving here!" Carolyn said sharply. "And that is final."

Victoria and I exchanged glances. Victoria put her hand on Carolyn's. "But perhaps John is right, dear. Maybe it is best that we leave. I hate to think about leaving John, or that terrible journey back, but. . . ."

"NO!" Carolyn shouted it.

I made a firm stand. "Why not?" I asked, trying to stay calm.

"I will not leave Count Drakula," Carolyn announced brazenly.

It was as I had feared. "I thought so," I said impatiently. I went over to Carolyn and faced her squarely. "I had a feeling you were getting in a bit over your head, young lady. Well, I am not going to stand idly by and watch you make a fool of yourself. He'll only use you, Carolyn. He'll only hurt you. I will not permit that to happen. I intend to put a stop

to this little flirtation of yours before it gets too far out of hand."

"You will kindly mind your own business," Carolyn spat.

"Carolyn!" Victoria looked positively aghast. She looked as though she were seeing her sister for the first time in her life.

"Leave me alone, Victoria. I am quite capable of looking out for my own affairs, and I will not have your husband interfering with my life."

"Carolyn," Victoria breathed. "John isn't trying to interfere, dear. I'm sure he has your best interests at heart. After all, you barely know this Count Drakula. He only came here a few days ago. You know nothing about him. You can't really be serious about him."

Carolyn whirled around and glowered at Victoria. "And what would you say if I told you I was serious about the count?"

"Carolyn!" Victoria's hand went automatically to the crucifix hanging from the gold chain around her neck.

Carolyn's eyes unconsciously followed Victoria's fingers. Suddenly Carolyn collapsed into a fit of sobbing. She shoved back her chair, knocking it to the floor, and dashed from the room.

Victoria started to go after her.

"No, Victoria," I said quickly. "Leave her alone. I think she wants to be alone. I think she should be."

"Yes, perhaps you're right." Victoria dropped back into her chair, looking as though she weighed a thousand pounds. "I had no idea, John," she said vaguely.

"I suspected something was going on, but I hadn't the foggiest notion that it had gone this far. I knew the count was interested in Carolyn, but I just thought Carolyn was amusing herself. After all, there's little else to amuse her here."

I went over to Victoria and took her hand. "That's why I thought it best that you and Carolyn leave here. Please try to help me convince Carolyn that she should go back to California and Walter Bradshaw."

Victoria shook her head slowly. "I'll try to talk her into going back to California, but we had better not mention Walter Bradshaw's name. Carolyn would side with the count just to spite us, knowing that we approve of Walter and disapprove of her noble count."

"He gives me the willies," I said. "Do you know that just a short while ago while I was shaving, I propped the mirror up on the window to catch the light and I found that the count, who was standing directly behind me, cast no reflection."

Victoria gasped and stared at me. She turned the color of death and snatched at the crucifix hanging about her neck. "Oh my God," she gasped. Her mouth fell open. "Vampires show no reflection," she said, as though her voice were a million miles away.

Her face was etched with fear. I could have kicked myself for saying what I did. Now I really had managed to frighten her. But the damage was done. There was nothing I could do to change it.

We both turned when we heard the door open. The four women were standing there.

"Have you finished your meal?" one of them asked.

"Yes. You can clear things away," I said. I knew Victoria could not answer. She was obviously suffering from a slight case of shock.

The count entered on the heels of the ladies. Victoria gasped when she saw him.

"Good evening, Victoria," he said. Victoria merely stared at him. She didn't speak. "Is there anything wrong, my dear?" he asked.

Before Victoria could move to answer, I said, "I'm afraid Victoria and Carolyn had a slight argument."

"Argument?" I thought the count was smiling but I could not be certain.

"Nothing serious. Just a slight misunderstanding." I reached out and helped Victoria up out of her chair. "Come, darling. Why not go to your room for a moment. I would like to speak to Count Drakula privately."

Victoria offered no resistance. She was acting like a puppet on a string.

"No reflection," she muttered, as I led her out of the room.

"And what do you wish to speak to me about, doctor?" the count asked after I had closed the door behind Victoria.

I glanced toward the women clearing the table. The count snapped his fingers, scowled at them and motioned toward the door. The ladies filed out hurriedly.

"Carolyn," I said bluntly when we were alone. "I'm afraid I will have to ask your assistance with a rather delicate situation."

"Whatever I can do to help I will be most happy to do," the count said.

"I don't know how to broach the subject, count, but I suppose the best way is the direct way. It seems my dear, innocent, little sister-in-law is infatuated with you."

The count laughed as I knew he would. "Charming. Charming."

"Not so charming," I corrected. "Carolyn is a very impressionable girl. She is engaged to a certain young man in Los Angeles, California. You would be doing me and my wife a great favor if you would not encourage Carolyn. As I said, she is impressionable and very young, as you can see. You are a man of experi-

ence, no doubt. I'm sure you know how to discourage affairs such as this."

The count studied me for a moment, then said, "But why should I want to discourage it? I find Carolyn quite delightful. I am most flattered that she has fallen in love with me."

"I did not say she had fallen in love with you," I said sternly, sounding like a disgruntled father. "I said she was infatuated with you. There's a difference."

The count shrugged. "The only difference is in the amount of time involved. Infatuations usually develop into love before long."

"And that is exactly what I want to avoid," I told him.

"Why? Do you disapprove of me, doctor?"

"You know very well that anything serious developing between you and my sister-in-law would be most—shall we say—inconvenient. We are from different cultures, different societies. You're European nobility. Carolyn is middle-class American. You're a communist; we are democratic. It wouldn't be practical for things to get out of hand, if you know what I mean," I said.

The smug look on his face was repulsive. I was tempted to put my fist into it.

"I'm sorry, my friend. I admit that I am a few years Carolyn's senior. Other than that fact, I see nothing unusual about a love affair developing between us. Even the matter of the difference in our ages seems insignificant. Here in Europe it is customary for young women to marry men many years older than themselves. It gives the girl security, stability."

I was dumfounded. "You can't mean that you intend encouraging Carolyn?"

"Perhaps," the count said flippantly. "I see no reason to discourage the girl."

"My dear count. Think of Carolyn. You aren't really serious about her. I thought you were, but now that I look at you, I know that you are merely toying with the girl's affections."

"You may be right," he admitted bluntly. "But truthfully, Doctor Hamilton, I can not see what business it is of yours."

I exploded. "Carolyn is part of my family. She is my responsibility. I have every right to interfere in this matter." I was fuming. "Why the girl isn't twenty-one years old yet."

The count waved that bit of information aside. "No matter," he said. "I would prefer you tended to your own business and not to Carolyn's and mine."

I could feel my face getting hotter and hotter. "I will most definitely interfere," I threatened.

The count bowed low. "Then by all means interfere, my friend. But I fear it will do you no good."

"We'll see about that!"

"Yes," the count said, pausing dramatically. "We'll see about that." He bowed again and left the room.

Chapter 13

Letter from Miss Carolyn Stuart to Mr. Walter Bradshaw, Los Angeles, California, U. S. A.

October 12th

Walter,

Get out of my life. I never want to see you again. . . . Never! Never! Never! Never! I hate you!

No! Walter! Help me!

C.

Chapter 14

Victoria Hamilton's Diary

October 12th

He casts no reflection! Oh, my God! What have we gotten ourselves mixed up in? I'm frightened, really frightened. I had a feeling that something ominous might happen ever since John found that hideous coffin in the cellar—ever since he pulled the stake out from the skeleton's heart. Oh, I know he will say that I'm talking insanity, that there are no such things as vampires, but he's wrong. With all of John's scientific knowledge, how can he explain the fact that the count casts no reflection in a mirror? I was afraid to face my fears before this, but now I must face them and I must warn everyone. They will have to believe me. I will have to make them believe me. How could I have been so blind to it all? The warnings of the villagers, the legends, the daily schedule—awake at night, asleep during the day. It all fits together with the tales I've heard and read about vampires. I know it is all true now, fantastic as it may seem.

And Carolyn? We must get her away from here. She is in the clutches of that fiendish man, I know she is. I know my sister very well, and I've noticed for the past few days that she has not been herself. Since Drakula showed up Carolyn has been overly flirtatious and gay, extremely flippant, almost to the point of insincerity. And yet for all her unnatural gaiety and sup-

posed happiness, she has become more and more drawn and pale. I thought at first that it was due to the fact that she was getting no sunshine, what with her sleeping until dark and staying up until dawn. But now I know better. It isn't the lack of sun, it is the fact that Drakula and Carolyn—Oh, I can't write it. I don't even want to think about such a horrible thing, even though it is true.

I must make John believe me! I must warn him. I know he is as concerned as I am for Carolyn, but I'm afraid he will not face the ugly truth. He believes Carolyn to be infatuated with Count Drakula. He doesn't realize that Carolyn can't help herself. We must get her away from here. We must!

I can hear John and the count talking in the next room. Talking? No, their voices are raised, at least John's is. So they aren't talking, they're arguing.

We are so far away from home. I wish we'd never come. No, I don't mean that. John had to come. It is best that we came with him. Left to himself here in this terrible castle, Lord only knows what might have happened to him. He would have found that casket by himself. The Petrofs would have deserted, and he would have been left to the count's ugly mercy. At least we are a party of three. There is safety in numbers, they say.

John just stormed into the bedroom, slamming the door behind him.

"John," I said anxiously, getting up from the writing desk. "What is it? What were you and the count fighting about?"

John clenched and unclenched his fists as he paced back and forth, running his hands through his hair from time to time. "What else? Your little sister, of course," he said. "Drakula is an egomaniac," he breathed. "That man is actually delighted that a

young, innocent girl like Carolyn is attracted to him. He intends to encourage her." His face was scarlet with rage. "He even hinted at marriage. Can you imagine the nerve of that character?"

The look of worry and anger that was splashed across John's face made me momentarily forget about vampires, about monsters, about fiends—but only momentarily. I thought of Carolyn. She was innocent of what was happening. It was obvious that the count had her under his hellish spell. John must not accuse her unjustly or think ill of her.

"We must get Carolyn away from here," I said anxiously.

I couldn't tell John my fears yet. He would only make light of them. His trained, scientific mind would refuse to accept such beliefs as I harbored. I would have to work this out alone, I decided, at least for the time being. Our first move, however, was to force Carolyn to leave here immediately. We had to spirit her away, and it would have to be done against her will.

Idly my fingers toyed with the tiny gold crucifix resting against my bosom. Of course, I thought, as John agreed with me and then returned to ranting and pacing back and forth. The crucifix had obviously saved me from the count's clutches. It would save Carolyn. I would give it to her to wear. I had John to protect me. I didn't really need the crucifix. I would make Carolyn wear it.

I racked my brain trying to remember the details of old tales and movies about vampires. What protected you against them? I bit down on my lower lip and tried to think above John's angry tirade. Religious articles warded them off, I knew, as I continued to toy with the tiny gold cross. All evil was afraid of the symbols of the powers of good. I would search out

my Bible and keep it with me at all times. But there were other things that could be used to drive off the vampires. Yes, I remember. Wolf bane or a wreath of garlic worn around the neck. But where on earth would I find garlic and wolf bane here in the Carpathian Mountains. I would have to rely solely on the crucifix and the Bible.

I hadn't been listening to what John was saying.

"We'll have to put a stop to it somehow, Victoria. We can't afford to get mixed up with this Count Drakula and his government and his politics. Carolyn must be made to see reason. She is just being headstrong and stubborn. She doesn't care a rap about the count. She's just being a foolish adolescent. She thinks she's being clever and grown-up. Well, I will not tolerate it, Victoria. I just simply will not tolerate it." He slammed his fist down hard on the writing desk.

"John, John," I said, surprised at my own sudden calm. I felt that I had already solved the matter. "We'll take Carolyn home as soon as possible. It's the only thing to do. I have a feeling it is more than just girlishness that is causing her to behave so unthinkingly."

John cocked his head at me. "What's that you say? What else could it be?" he asked. "She's a spoiled, headstrong, silly little . . ."

"John, please don't say anything you may be sorry for later on. You know very well that Carolyn just isn't herself." I hesitated, screwing up my courage for the arguments John would no doubt launch the moment he heard me out. "There's more to this situation than meets the eye." Again I hesitated, waiting to be sure I had John's complete attention. "Those stories of vampires and all," I started, slightly wary. "They're true, John. I know they are."

He stared at me briefly, unbelieving. "Oh, Victoria. Be sensible. Please don't start inventing a lot of nonsense simply to justify your sister's irresponsible behavior."

"I'm not inventing anything," I protested stiffly. "As a scientist, you must agree that there are many, many things which are unexplainable."

"Of course there are," John said. "But certainly not vampires and werewolves and the so-called undead."

"Why not? You said yourself the count did not cast a reflection in your shaving mirror. Explain why he didn't without facing the possibility that Count Drakula is everything everyone says he is—a vampire!" My voice began to shake.

John snorted. "A vampire. Really, Victoria, I'm beginning to think you're becoming as ridiculous as Carolyn."

He was upset, that was obvious.

"I am not being ridiculous, John. I'm merely putting facts together and facing the truth."

"The truth? Vampirism? Oh, Victoria. I'm surprised at you."

"I know, I know," I said, holding up my hand. "I thought vampires were a lot of nonsense too until I started putting things together."

"What things?"

"The way Carolyn is behaving toward the count . . . the way she looks—anemic . . . the coffin with the stake in it . . . the looks of horror on the people's faces whenever this castle was mentioned . . . and the final touch was the fact that you noticed that the count casts no reflection in a mirror. John, what other explanation is there but that Drakula is a vampire, he and those strange women who appear only at night. Those women don't live with their families." My voice was becoming breathless with excite-

ment and fear. "There are no other houses, no families in this vicinity, Skinsky told us that when we started out for this place. This was the only place in the region in which to house us. There are no other houses." I was sounding hysterical. My voice kept rising and rising.

"Victoria," John said sharply, taking me by the shoulders and shaking me. "Stop it." I forced myself to be quiet. "You know you're talking nonsense. There are no such things as vampires."

I pushed away from him. "John, you must listen to me."

"Not another word. I agree with you on one thing though; we must get Carolyn out of here. I'm sending you both back as soon as possible. Immediately, if it can be arranged. I'll tell the count."

"No!" I shouted as John started out of the room. I rushed at him and threw myself into his arms. "Oh, John, no! Don't tell the count. We must leave, all of us, right away. But don't tell Drakula. He'll prevent it. He'll do something horrible. You mustn't tell Drakula of our plans. We can sneak away without his knowing that we've gone."

"We?"

"Yes, all of us. We must get out of here before it is too late."

"Oh, Victoria. Be sensible. Please," John said, trying hard to keep his patience with me. "You know very well that I can't leave here."

"You must," I said, gripping him hard. "You can't stay here now, John. Count Drakula will. . . ."

"Victoria. I refuse to listen to any more of your silly notions about vampires. Don't ask me to explain why I didn't see a reflection of the count in my shaving mirror. Maybe I just didn't have it tilted at the

right angle. Maybe there was a tiny flaw in the glass. Whatever it was, I'm sure there is a perfectly good explanation as to why I didn't see his reflection. It was not because Drakula is a vampire, that I can assure you."

"John, listen to me," I implored.

"No. Not another word. I'm going to arrange for you and Carolyn to leave as soon as possible."

I couldn't let him do this. I had to stop him. He could not stay here alone—he couldn't! "I'm not going," I said harshly. John whirled around. "If you're staying, then I'm staying with you."

"You are getting out of here, Victoria, you and Carolyn. That's final."

"No. I can be as stubborn as you." I was staring hard at him, my chin jutting out in defiance. It was for his own good. "I will not leave you here alone."

"Victoria, I do not intend to have a scene. You and Carolyn are leaving here and that's that."

He turned again and stormed out.

I stood dazed and frightened. He was going to tell the count that we were leaving. He mustn't. He mustn't. I rushed after him but he was gone—gone in search of Count Drakula.

Carolyn, I thought. Perhaps if I got her away first, then I could return to protect John from his own stubbornness. Yes, I'd get Carolyn away first. I'd have to worry about John and myself later. For the moment, Carolyn was in the greatest danger.

I hurried through the sitting room toward Carolyn's bedroom. My hand was undoing the clasp of the crucifix as I went. But the bedroom was empty. I stood there for a moment remembering Carolyn's burst of tears, her flight into this room. But she wasn't here now. I had half expected to find her sprawled on

the bed, eyes red, mouth pouting. But she wasn't here. I went through to the little toilet closet. The door stood ajar. The closet was empty.

I heard a sound and turned quickly. John was standing in the doorway between Carolyn's bedroom and the sitting room.

"She isn't here?" he asked.

"No." I glanced around, showing him the empty room.

"I can't find the count either," he said, his voice laced with suspicion. "They're most likely together. Come on."

"John wait," I said. But he did not wait. He started out of the sitting room. I had to hurry to keep up with him. I called after him as he started down the hall, heading in the direction of the stairway that led to the first level.

"John, wait. Where are you going?" I asked anxiously, clutching at his arm to slow him down.

He didn't slow. "Drakula must occupy the Petrofs' old apartment off the kitchen," he said. "Where else could they be." He let the inference hang suggestively in mid air.

"We mustn't tell the count our plans," I pleaded. "Let's get Carolyn and confer amongst ourselves, John. Please don't say anything to the count. Please, for my sake."

John didn't answer. He hurried down the long, dusty staircase and turned toward the kitchen area. Halfway across the foyer we heard a soft, girlish laugh. It was Carolyn's. There was no mistaking it. It came from behind the closed double doors.

"Come on," John said angrily, as he headed toward the doors. He didn't bother to knock or announce himself. He took hold of the doors and flung them open.

Carolyn and Count Drakula were sprawled on a divan in a most compromising position. My hand flew to my mouth and I gasped. But I did not gasp at the sight of Carolyn's impropriety, it was the position of the count's mouth at her neck that caused me to choke on a scream.

"Carolyn!" John barked. "Go to your room."

"Oh, bother," she said casually, as she sat up and began adjusting the neckline of her blouse. "Why do you always have to spoil my fun. You sound like the father in some old melodrama. Why don't you leave me alone and mind your own business," she said petulantly.

I frowned. This wasn't the Carolyn I knew and loved. This wasn't my sister. This was some stranger who sat before us.

She got to her feet and swayed unsteadily. If I didn't know better, I would have said that Carolyn was inebriated. She took a step forward and almost lost her balance. The count steadied her and eased her gently toward us. There was a sickeningly smug grin on Drakula's face. I knew John's temper was getting out of control. Unconsciously, I raised the tiny gold cross I had taken from around my neck. I was standing slightly behind John, so he didn't see me do it.

As I raised the crucifix, Count Drakula's eyes widened. He suddenly cowered in fear. He covered his face with his hands and slunk out of the room.

I was right. There was no doubt about it, I thought, with a sinking feeling in my stomach. Drakula was a vampire.

Chapter 15

John Hamilton's Journal

October 12th

My assignment is finished almost before I've started it. I've decided that we will leave Castle Drakula and return home.

Carolyn is behaving most shamefully. And she has become so pale and drawn. Carolyn's infatuation with the count has suddenly gotten out of hand. Tonight Victoria and I found Carolyn in a most indelicate situation in the downstairs drawing room with Drakula. I've ordered Carolyn and Victoria to pack immediately. We'll leave in the morning, as soon as I have made arrangements for our departure with Count Drakula. I'm sure his government is going to be most unhappy, but it cannot be helped. My family's welfare must come first.

Victoria, too, is becoming a bit strange. She keeps talking about vampires and is convinced that Drakula is the pile of bones we discovered in the coffin—the skeleton with the stake through its heart. I've tried to reason with her, but it seems to be in vain. Knowing Victoria, I had best not interfere with her notions. She'll come out of it in good time.

The reason I've decided to leave is certainly not because I believe Drakula to be a vampire. On the contrary, I find him much too human. His display with Carolyn this evening was the final blow. The girl is

young and innocent and I will not have her morals corrupted by some communist count.

Speaking of the count, he seems to have disappeared. He is usually underfoot until dawn, but after the scene in the drawing room he rushed away and I haven't been able to speak to him about our leaving.

It wasn't like the count to slink off like that. We had a heated discussion about Carolyn earlier, and he stood his ground. Why then did he run away when we caught him red-handed? It wasn't in keeping with his character. I expected him to stand up to me as he had in the sitting room, but instead he chose to run away. He's a very strange man, and one I would prefer to see no more of after tomorrow. The man is unscrupulous and obviously without a shred of moral fiber.

I intend waiting here for Drakula if it takes all night. I know he will show up sooner or later; he always has and I see no reason for him to change his schedule. I have a rather strong feeling that he will try to see Carolyn again, or that she will try to see him. I intend to prevent such a rendezvous. There will be no more opportunities for them to continue their little intrigue behind our backs.

I suppose Carolyn is right in saying that I'm acting like the irate father from some old silent movie, but I just can't help it. It's for her own good. Can't she see that? I know Victoria does.

Victoria. What would I do without her? I rant and rave at her, and she tolerates my ill temper and moody disposition. If she wants to go on believing that Count Drakula is a vampire, all well and good—I intend to allow her to continue believing it. In that way, I will have no opposition from her about getting out of this blasted place and away from that unsavory Drakula.

The serving women just came in. Now there's a strange bunch for you. I asked them if they'd seen

Drakula. They didn't answer. They just looked at me with those pale, lifeless eyes of theirs and shook their heads. I thought one of them smiled at me just now. Perhaps I imagined it. I can't trust my imagination these days.

"John," Victoria called softly from the doorway to Carolyn's bedroom. "Can you come here a moment, please." She cast a cautious eye at the serving women and then motioned to me.

I got up from the desk and went to her. She didn't say a word. She urged me into the bedroom and closed the door. She looked worried.

"What is it?" I asked.

She glanced toward Carolyn, who was standing mute and still, gazing out at the blackness of the night. "She's acting very strangely, John. I'm afraid for her."

"What do you mean, strangely?"

"Talk to her. You'll see what I mean. Talk to her about Count Drakula."

I stiffened. I didn't want to talk to Carolyn about Drakula. But the frightened look in Victoria's eyes forced me to do what she asked. I went over to Carolyn and put my arm around her. She didn't move a muscle.

"How are you feeling, Carolyn? I hope you aren't too upset with me."

Carolyn turned slowly. She looked as innocent as a fresh flower. "Upset with you, John? But why should I be?"

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed Victoria's anxious expression. She was urging me on. "That business with Drakula," I started, feeling most uncomfortable.

"What business?" Carolyn was looking at me with wide, innocent eyes.

"Downstairs in the drawing room."

"Drawing room?" She shook her head. "I haven't been in any drawing room. I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about, John." She gave me a very weak smile, then turned from me and resumed her study of the night beyond her windowpane.

I glanced at Victoria, who motioned to me. I left Carolyn and went to her.

"She doesn't seem to remember any of it," Victoria whispered. "It is as if she's blocked it from her mind. She's in some sort of daze."

I frowned. "A temporary emotional block," I said, half to myself and half to Victoria. "It'll pass."

"Will it?" Victoria asked. Skepticism spiked her words.

I couldn't trust myself to answer.

Chapter 16

John Hamilton's Journal

October 13th

That strange business with Carolyn gave me a sleepless night, or should I say a sleepless day. Here it is evening again and I have been up for almost an hour. Drakula still has not made an appearance. We must be up and away from this place tonight. I must have him make the arrangements, even though Victoria begs me not to alert him to our intention of leaving. I must tell him. It is the only honest thing to do. I can't slink away, as he did last night. I'm not that sort—even if it were possible to go away without requesting him to make the arrangements, which it is not.

Truthfully, I dislike the thought of leaving. I have never quit a project before and I do not like quitting this one. Yet, regardless of the scientific importance of my work, I feel that my family's well being is my first concern. I should never have allowed myself the luxury of taking them with me. But all that is done and finished and I will not pine over old mistakes. I had no idea that the location would turn out to be so remote, so austere. I had expected isolation, of course, but not desolation. This is no place for Carolyn and Victoria. I have only myself to blame for what has happened.

Ah, finally. Count Drakula has come in. Or did he

materialize? I heard no door open. (I'm letting Victoria's notions get to me.)

"Good evening, Dr. Hamilton. I trust you are well this evening?"

"Very well, thank you, count. I have a favor to ask of you."

He was grinning in that devilish way he had. "Anything, dear doctor. You have but to name it."

"We are leaving. Tonight, if possible."

The count straightened and looked at me with disdain. "Impossible," he said in an imperious voice. "You cannot leave."

"We can and we intend to," I answered firmly.

"You do not know what you are saying, doctor. You can not just walk out of here. This is not America and you are not a tourist."

I settled back in my chair and got ready for the arguments I knew would be offered. "I realize there may be ramifications," I said, "but it cannot be helped." I paused, fixing my eyes firmly on his. "In view of what has happened, I have no other recourse but to take my family away from here." I narrowed my eyes. "You know, of course, to what I refer?"

The count smiled smugly. He fanned out his hands. "An innocent *tête-à-tête*," he said, dismissing the matter with a wave of his hand.

"I do not agree with you, Count Drakula, and I am very concerned for my sister-in-law's well being," I said stiffly. "I look upon the incident with much disfavor. I am taking my family away from here so that there will be no possibility of the incident repeating itself."

The count chuckled. I despised him for his insolence.

"You think unkindly of me, I know, Doctor Ham-

ilton. But regardless of what you think of me personally, it must have no bearing whatsoever on the work you have come here to do."

I squared my shoulders and prepared myself to stand my ground.

"I'm sure our governments will not approve of your leaving before the project is complete," the count said.

"I am sure our governments will understand when I place the facts before them."

The count continued to smile. "Your government, perhaps. Mine?" He fanned out his hands again. His eyes glinted like steel darts. "I can not be sure they are going to look upon your departure with favor."

"And why would they not?" I asked. "Especially after I have made my explanations."

"You are forgetting, of course, that I, too, will submit a report as to why you have chosen to leave. I am afraid my government will not easily dismiss what I have to say."

He was trying to browbeat me, but I refused to let him. "You can't threaten me, count. I have no doubt that you will do everything you can to besmirch my purpose for this trip as well as my reputation, but I don't really care. As long as my family is left unblemished, that is all I care about. You are a corrupt and no good scoundrel, Drakula, and I do not intend to remain in this house another night. We are leaving as soon as it can be arranged. I don't give a hang about your political threats."

"What political threats?" Victoria asked as she came into the room. She was dressed for traveling, which pleased me.

"You look lovely, my dear Mrs. Hamilton," the count said, smiling.

She arched her eyebrows and stiffened her back. I noticed she was carrying her Bible, which was not like Victoria. She was religious, yes, but not to the point of display. I'd never seen her carry a Bible before, except when we were married. When the count spoke to her, she positioned the Bible upright. I thought I saw the count flinch slightly and inch backward.

"I am quite well, thank you, count," she said icily. "I trust you had a good night's sleep." There was sarcasm dripping from her voice. She clutched the Bible tightly. It was as if the book itself was giving her strength.

The count shrugged uncomfortably. "You are dressed for traveling," he commented.

"Yes," Victoria answered flatly. "We plan to leave at once."

The count bowed slightly. "I must apologize, my dear," he said, "but I cannot permit you to leave."

Victoria's eyes got round as saucers. "And why not?" she asked, hugging the Bible closer to her.

"It has nothing to do with me personally," the count explained. "As I was telling your husband, my government will not look too kindly on your departure before the work on the earthquake project is completed."

I took one of Victoria's hands in mine. "And I was just telling the count that his government can go hang," I said, pleased with myself.

The count looked at me maliciously. "It is not as simple as you may think," he said. "Here in Rumania you are residing in a 'controlled' society. A sudden departure of the sort you plan—in view of the importance of your work—would cause considerable wonder, if not, perhaps, resentment. There is little doubt but that you would be, shall we say . . . detained."

Victoria and I looked at each other. We knew the precise meaning of his words. Detention here meant only one thing—imprisonment. Neither of us spoke.

"Insofar as your report to the I.G.S. is concerned," the count continued, "there is very little likelihood that the report will ever reach its destination." He had us and he knew it. He could arrange our arrest without batting an eye, and things would then be far worse for Carolyn and Victoria. I suddenly saw clearly and felt defeated. One look at Victoria told me she too was frightened by the prospect of our becoming political prisoners in Rumania. We could easily be put away and never heard of again. We wouldn't be the first, this we knew. Yet I had to stand up to Drakula—or try to.

"You wouldn't dare," I snarled.

"Ah, but indeed I would dare," he said. He chuckled again. "I would be only too happy to do a service for my government."

I felt Victoria's hand tighten on mine. She looked at me with fear in her eyes. "He's bluffing, isn't he, John?"

I wished I could give her the answer she wanted to hear. I could not. "I'm afraid he isn't," I said. "He wouldn't be the first to arrange such imprisonment. It's 1946 all over again," I said, almost to myself.

Victoria looked at me. She didn't understand.

"In 1946," I explained, "the Communist Party took over Rumania's government and all noncommunists—or anyone else, for that matter—who opposed communism were either imprisoned or killed. They made it all very simple. Death, in one form or another, or communism. No, Victoria, I don't think the count here is bluffing. They are a hellish lot," I added, spitting the words directly in the count's face.

"But we're not in Russia," Victoria argued. "This is Rumania. It's only a small satellite of communism."

"It makes no difference, dear. Russia controls everything here, its people, its policies, everything. Under their new constitution, Rumania's dependence on Russia was made very strong. Then Rumania joined the Warsaw Pact, a Russian dominated military alliance. Oh, the poorer Rumanians tried to assert their independence from Russia, but people like the count here made that impossible."

Drakula merely grinned. "You give me too much credit, my dear doctor. I am not involved in local politics. I only use them to gain an end whenever necessary."

"You monster," Victoria spat, losing her control. "You can not force us to stay in this horrible place."

I patted her hand. "I'm afraid he can," I said, my voice loaded down with defeat. "I'm afraid he can."

Victoria suddenly lost her composure completely. Unconsciously, she dropped her Bible and threw herself into my arms. "Oh, John. What are we going to do?" she sobbed.

Neither of us realized then that Drakula kicked the Bible under a nearby divan, out of sight.

"Come, come, my dear," Drakula said softly. "There is no reason to alarm yourselves. I do not particularly want to resort to involvement with my government."

I gave him a frosty look. "Not much," I said sarcastically.

"No, really, my good doctor," he said. His eyes seemed guileless, yet I could not bring myself to put any trust whatsoever in this devil of a man. "The present-day Rumania means little to me. I am from the old country and have little to do with these mod-

ern methods. I will not resort to them unless you threaten me, in which event I have little recourse but to threaten you in return. I mean you no harm. On the contrary, I can be of great benefit to you if you will permit me."

Victoria clung to me. "Don't listen to him, John. Don't listen."

It was as if she hadn't spoken. The count continued. "I am a Szekely, as my fathers before me and their fathers before them. In these veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship. Centuries ago, here in the cauldron of European nationalities, the Ugric tribe bore down from Iceland the conquering spirit which Thor himself gave them. The House of Drakula was foremost in inspiring other races to join in our fight to overcome the barbarians who overran the great river into the land of the Turks. We were beaten back time and time again but we ended victoriously. And after the endless wars for independence, we of the Drakula blood emerged leaders. Ah, my good people, the Szekelys—and the Drakulas as their heart's blood, their brains, and their swords—can boast of victories greater than those of the Hapsburgs and the Romanovs, and even of the communists and your United States of America. But, alas, the warlike times are finished for us. The glories of our great family are nothing more than another story to tell. But I can make your blood as mine. You can become lions of battle or mental giants. You have but to say the word."

Victoria and I were staring at him. What he was saying seemed to have neither rhyme nor reason. There was no need for him to rave on about his bloodline, his ancestors. We weren't interested. What was he hinting at? We didn't want to hear it. We

wanted to be out of there, away from him and his lost ancestors.

"Finish your project, Dr. Hamilton," the count said, again smiling as if some devilish joke were lurking on his lips. "Finish it quickly, and by then perhaps I will have had a chance to change your mind about leaving. If not, I promise I will arrange for your departure without further ado."

Victoria and I looked at each other again. We knew we were at his mercy. There was nothing we could do but agree to his terms.

"We must stay, John," Victoria said softly. "I don't wish to, but we have no other alternative."

I nodded. "Yes, I suppose you're right," I said. I wanted Drakula to leave us so that we could talk privately and make our plans concerning Carolyn. "But, of course, you and Carolyn need not stay," I said finally. I looked hopefully at Drakula. "You are only concerned about my project. If I stay, then there is no reason why my wife and sister-in-law must remain also. I will stay. Arrange to have them sent home immediately."

The count bowed. "As you wish," he said.

Victoria looked puzzled. Then she panicked. "No," she said firmly. She turned to me. "If you are staying, then I am staying, John. I will not be sent away. Please don't send me away. Send Carolyn, but not me."

I didn't want to argue with Victoria in front of Drakula. I decided I'd agree with her for the moment, then make my demands in private. "Very well, Victoria. Tell Carolyn to get ready."

At that moment, Carolyn joined us. She looked more pale and drawn than ever. If she hadn't been walking about, I would have guessed her to be at the point of death.

"Get ready for what?" she asked.

"To leave," Victoria said bluntly. "You are going to go home. John and I are going to stay and finish the project."

Carolyn opened her mouth to say something, but Victoria cut her off.

"I won't have any arguments, Carolyn. There has been enough foolishness going on around here, and you have been the cause whether you wish to admit it or not. You're going back and that's all there is to it."

Carolyn looked at Count Drakula. It was as if a message had been passed between them. She looked back at Victoria. Her eyes were suddenly more lifeless than before. "All right," she said, "when do I leave?"

She was talking strangely, and she was suddenly taking it all too calmly. Both Victoria and I looked suspiciously at one another. Something was brewing, but we couldn't think what it could be. It didn't take long, however, to find out.

The count started to leave the room. "I will arrange for a wagon to be brought up. It should be here in a few hours. I would suggest you pack your belongings, my dear Carolyn."

"Yes, yes, of course," Carolyn answered, sounding dazed and unsure. "If that is what you wish."

"That is what I wish," the count answered.

Carolyn turned and walked toward her bedroom. Her feet seemed not to touch the fur rugs. It was as though she were walking in her sleep. She disappeared inside her room and shut the door.

"Now what?" Victoria asked, after the count and Carolyn were gone.

"You're going with Carolyn," I said firmly.

"I am not, John. I refuse to leave you here."

"Victoria. Be sensible. Nothing is going to happen

to me." I took her into my arms. She smelled warm and comfortable, and I suddenly didn't want her to leave me.

"Please, John. Let me stay with you. I can help with the project. We'll finish it in half the time if I help you. And besides, I must protect you from Drakula."

"Now don't start that nonsense," I told her softly. I kissed her hair. "I want you to stay, darling. But I don't trust the count. These communists are a tricky lot."

"But don't you see," Victoria argued. "With me here, chances are they won't try anything. They wouldn't dare detain a scientist *and* his wife after the project is concluded. It would become an international scandal. They could possibly detain you on some pretext, and they could concoct the story that you decided to defect. If we sent Carolyn home, she could act as our watchdog to see that we got out safely. Oh, John. You must see it my way. Please let me stay with you."

I didn't know why, but I relented. I nodded. "All right, darling. If it means so much to you."

"It does. It does," Victoria said happily.

We kissed to seal our bargain.

I sighed. "At least Carolyn is leaving, and Drakula isn't putting up much of a fight about it." I rubbed my chin. "It's strange though that he should be so calm about Carolyn's leaving, especially after our row last night. Why is he so cooperative about letting Carolyn go now?"

Victoria was watching me, but her mind, I could tell, was running off in a different direction. "He's up to something," she said ominously. "I know it. He isn't going to let Carolyn out of his clutches this

easily." She suddenly grabbed me and gasped. "My Bible, John." She started to look around. "Where's my Bible?"

"Your Bible? I don't know," I answered. "You put it down on the desk, didn't you?"

We started to look. Victoria searched frantically; I didn't feel the need for a Bible, so my search wasn't as thorough as it could have been.

"Maybe you dropped it," I told her. I knelt and started to look under the chairs and couches. In the shadows, I didn't see the book, which Drakula had kicked well back against the wall. "No, I don't see it," I told her.

Victoria was frantic. "Oh, John, the Bible and my gold cross are our only protection against him."

"Oh, now I understand," I said. "The vampire, right?"

"Don't scoff, John. I'm serious. We must protect ourselves with religious articles. We must find that Bible. I gave my crucifix to Carolyn for protection."

A loud crash interrupted our search. The crash came from Carolyn's room. Victoria and I stared at each other for a moment then rushed toward the room.

Carolyn's door was locked. Victoria started to pound on it with her fists. "Carolyn! Carolyn!"

I found myself joining her.

Then we heard the click of the lock, the sliding back of the bolt. The knob turned. The door began to open.

Victoria and I stood there, staring. Drakula was standing on the other side of the door. His eyes were smug; his face was otherwise devoid of expression.

"I'm afraid Carolyn fainted," he said, grinning at us. "I've taken the liberty of placing her on the bed." He turned and gestured toward her. "But do not look so

worried, my friends. It is nothing serious. It only means she must postpone her departure a day or two. She seems to have come down with a slight fever. She is very pale and weak. This sort of thing attacks many tourists who are not used to our environment. It will pass. Do not be afraid."

Victoria gripped my hand and pointed to the floor. Beside the bed was a broken gold chain. The tiny cross it had held was nowhere to be seen.

Despite Drakula's words I felt very much afraid. I felt afraid for all of us.

Chapter 17

John Hamilton's Journal

October 14th

Last night I forced myself to retire early so that I might rise early and get started on the project. For the first time since coming here I got up before nine o'clock in the morning. The day is magnificent, so clear and bright and fresh. The musty darkness of the castle is washed away by the morning's sun. It is indeed a beautiful place when one sees it in daylight. Trees grow everywhere and in every shade of green, and the sight of the blue purple mountains, standing row upon row, is breathtaking. I am almost tempted to awaken Victoria so that she may share the beauty of the place with me.

There isn't anyone about. It is obvious that no one expected me to start my day so early. Unless I find myself something to eat I'm afraid I will have to go without breakfast.

I looked in on Carolyn. Poor girl looks absolutely terrible. Her pallor is deathlike, there is no other word to describe it. She's still running a fever. I didn't want to disturb her. Sleep is the best remedy. Victoria will go to her when she wakes. I left the door to our bedroom and the door to Carolyn's open in case Carolyn awakens and calls out.

I could hear my footsteps echoing through the halls as I made my way down the wide stone stairway. Like

the upstairs living quarters, the downstairs was quiet. No one was moving about. I found some cheese and bread in the kitchen. I ate some and wrapped more in a napkin and stuffed it into my kit. I checked my equipment before leaving the castle. All was in order and I set out, convinced that the project would be accomplished quickly.

Beyond the cold, barren courtyard, mighty forests sloped up to the lofty heights of the Carpathians themselves. All around me the mountains towered upward with the bright morning sun falling full on them, bringing out all the magnificent colors of this beautiful range—deep blue and purple, green and brown, granite-colored rock mingled in an endless perspective of pointed crags and jagged cliffs. Snow-covered peaks stood high above me. Through an occasional rift in the mountains, I saw the white gleam of stately waterfalls. Birds were chirping merrily away and the warm sun on my shoulders made me feel alive for the first time in days. I forgot about the castle, about Drakula, about Carolyn. I did not forget Victoria. How I wanted her with me to share in this beautiful landscape.

As I crossed the tree line, the sun suddenly seemed to sink lower behind me. Shadows rose up about me, crept closer, stretched out before me. I could almost feel the chill of the snowy peaks. Gone was the warmth of the sun, the chirping of the birds, the gentle breezes. I was in the forest now, walking toward the base of the nearest mountain. The wind was growing stronger and colder as I made my way deeper into the tangle of trees and brush. My equipment felt suddenly heavier; it weighed me down. I shifted some paraphernalia from one shoulder to the other and changed the kit from one hand to the other. I made a mental note to remind myself to wear heav-

ier clothes and gloves tomorrow. It was cold in this gloomy forest.

Something made me turn and look back toward Castle Drakula. It was fortunate for me that I turned when I did because I discovered that the castle had vanished amongst the trees. I couldn't see its turrets, its gables or its spires. I stopped and began carefully retracing my steps. Then, through the denseness, I caught a glimpse of the decaying old place. Rather than take the chance of losing my way, I started to break branches, uproot shrubs, and leave traces of my path behind me as, once again, I started toward the mountains. It would not do to become lost in this infernal place, especially since I knew that night fell quickly and unexpectedly.

I hadn't gone more than a few hundred yards before I saw them. I froze in my tracks. I felt my stomach churn and had to avert my eyes from the horror of the grizzly scene. There, not more than a few feet in front of me, were Stefen and Olga Petrof. They were grotesque to see. They were dead, of course; that I knew without examining them. They were both lying on their backs, their faces turned up toward the sky. Their expressions were the most horrible I'd ever seen. Blind terror was imprinted on their faces. Their eyes bulged in their sockets, their mouths were wide open, their fingers clawed the hard, cold earth.

I forced myself to take a few steps nearer.

They were covered with dried blood, as was the ground surrounding them. Their throats had been torn out, as though by some monstrous animal. It was clear that they'd been set upon by a wolf pack—only such carnivorous beasts ripped and tore their victims in such a manner. Their clothing lay in shreds. Their

hair had been yanked out in patches. Their limbs were chewed and clawed, and if I hadn't been familiar with their shapes and nature of dress, I would not have been able to positively identify the Petrofs. It was a horrible sight to see.

When my stomach turned over I looked away and retched the small bit I'd eaten for breakfast. When my stomach calmed, my first reaction was to turn and run. But I was torn between the need to finish my work and the need to shut myself away from this gory sight. I closed my eyes and hurried past the bodies. After I was well past them, I knelt and said a silent prayer for the Petrofs' salvation. I prayed for my own protection as well, and then I rose and went on about my work, trying desperately not to think of the bodies I would again have to face on my way back.

As an aid to help me forget the Petrofs, I began talking aloud to myself. I went over the procedure I would follow once I'd reach the foot of the mountain and had set up my equipment. I checked and counted off the sticks of dynamite I'd taken with me. I would first make a study of the earth's crust, and in the course of my investigation would set off the explosives above, on and below the surface. The blasts would produce sound waves that would bounce back from the rock layers at various depths below the surface. The seismograph I had with me would measure the travel time of these waves and tell just what lay beneath.

By the time I reached my designated spot, the Petrofs were forgotten for the time being. I had brought the most sensitive seismograph, the Benioff. Tomorrow, with Victoria's help, I would bring out the other two instruments I'd need. No, I thought to myself, perhaps not tomorrow—not until the bodies of the

Petrofs were taken out of sight. Victoria must not see that grizzly scene.

I finished setting up the seismograph and measured out the distances for the charges and decided upon the force of the blasts. My work went well and by one o'clock I was satisfied enough to take a recess and eat the food I'd packed in my kit. But no sooner had I laid out the food when thoughts of the Petrofs slowly filtered back into my mind's eye and my appetite was lost. I pushed the food away and returned to my work.

The blasts were set off and I measured and recorded their effects. My findings were exciting. Swept into that excitement, I again forgot about everything except the project I had set for myself.

A cold blast of wind reminded me of the time. I strained to look up through the trees and saw that the sun was getting ready to quit for the day. Hurriedly I covered the equipment boxes with canvas. I built a hasty shelter for the tools I would leave behind and made ready to return to the castle.

I tried to think of some way of avoiding my second encounter with the bodies of Stefen and Olga Petrof, but there was no other trail, and if there were I would surely lose my way because it would not be marked as this trail was.

But my fears were unfounded. Strangely enough, when I got to the spot where I had come across the Petrofs, I stood and stared. The bodies were gone. There was no sign of them anywhere, and stranger still, there was no sign of their having been dragged or pulled or carried away. I scratched my chin, wondering if I were right about the spot. Yes, this was the place where I'd found them. I could see pieces of clothing, blood stains, tufts of hair. There was no doubt that I was standing at the right spot, but the Pet-

rofs had mysteriously disappeared. They were gone —vanished!

I didn't want to think of an explanation because the only explanation was too horrible to think about. The wolves, of course. . . . No, I wouldn't think about it.

Quickly I got my bearings and rushed back to the castle.

Victoria was sitting in front of the fire when I came into the sitting room. We talked for a moment about my work, about Carolyn, and then I asked, "Drakula? Has he shown up yet this evening?"

"No, not yet," Victoria said. "It's not quite sundown," she added, glancing toward the window and noticing the sun resting on the horizon. "He'll be here shortly, have no fears."

"Have you spoken to Carolyn?"

"Only for a moment. She rallied a while ago and stirred, but I couldn't get her to eat anything. Oh, John, I'm so worried about her. She looks dreadful."

I thought about the Petrofs. Naturally, I would never tell Victoria what I had found. "We'll get her out of here as soon as we can," I assured her. "The work went well today, and tomorrow, if you will help, I think we can make even better progress."

Drakula suddenly loomed beside us. "So the work went well," he said, smiling to display his sharp white teeth. "Splendid, splendid."

He wasn't at all pleased. I could tell that merely by looking at him.

"Victoria," I said softly, "would you mind terribly if I spoke to the count in private. There is something I must discuss with him."

She gave me a strange look. "What on earth could you possibly have to say to him that I shouldn't hear?"

"Please, Victoria. Why don't you go and sit with Carolyn? It will only take a few minutes."

The count, I noticed, was regarding me suspiciously.

"If you insist," Victoria answered hesitantly. She offered me her hand to help her out of the deep, comfortable chair. When her hand grasped mine, I felt her slip something to me. When I saw that Drakula was looking after Victoria, I glanced into my hand. There, resting in the palm, was the tiny gold crucifix that Victoria had given Carolyn. She had obviously found it somewhere in Carolyn's room. I closed my hand over it as the count turned his attention on me.

"And what do you wish to discuss with me now, doctor?"

"I went into the woods this morning and began my work, as you know."

"Yes, but that does not exactly please me. I would prefer that you wait until I am available in the evenings. We can accomplish the work together."

"I don't think you'll want to work in those woods at night after you've heard what I have to say."

"And what might that be?"

"Just before you came here," I started, "we had a pair of servants, Stefen and Olga Petrof."

"Yes, yes, I have heard you mention them," the count said impatiently.

"I found them," I said dramatically.

The count smiled. "Found them? Were they lost?"

I despised his levity. "They're dead, Count Drakula. Dead. They were killed by some wild, vicious animals. They were torn to shreds."

The count merely clucked his tongue in his cheek. "Ah, that is too bad, but it only serves as a reminder as to just how dangerous those woods can be. I would

suggest that you wait until I can go with you before you venture again into that forest. The wolves are an extreme menace. First the Petrofs, next you, Doctor Hamilton. I would be more careful if I were you."

"Their bodies have disappeared," I continued as though I hadn't heard a word Count Drakula said.

"Of course," he answered casually. "The wolves came back to finish their dinner."

I felt my stomach pitch over. I turned and sank into a chair, clutching my midsection. He had put it all so indelicately. I despised and hated him all the more for his manner, his flippancy, his lack of concern or respect.

"You don't intend doing anything about the Petrofs?" I asked after I had quieted myself.

"Do? But what would you have me do?"

"Report it, at least."

"Oh, I see. But I see no good in that," he said after a slight pause. "Besides, there are no corpses you say. The People's Republic will expect us to produce corpses. If none are available, I see no reason for bothering about the matter at all."

I was shocked out of my chair. "How can you be so heartless, so cold-blooded? Damn it, man, two people have been killed by wolves. Don't you feel you should notify the authorities so that the relatives of the Petrofs might at least be told?"

"Ah, you Americans are such slaves to detail and humanitarianism." He dismissed me with a wave of his hand. "I hope this has served as a warning. The woods are extremely dangerous, Dr. Hamilton. I would alert the fair Carolyn and your beautiful wife to this fact in case—" He didn't finish his sentence.

I could easily see he did not intend to do anything about the Petrofs. I myself would attend to making

the official report as soon as possible. For the time being I had the count to deal with.

"But if the woods are so dangerous during the daylight hours, aren't they doubly dangerous at night?"

"Not if you are with me, and not if we are carrying torches. The wolves will not attack where fires are burning. They, like all animals, are afraid of fire."

"I'm afraid I can't do as you ask," I insisted firmly. "My work has to be done during the day when the temperatures are at their highest. Later we will record the reaction of shock waves in nighttime temperatures, but that will be the final phase of the project. I cannot wait for you to join me, count. I intend to work tomorrow, as I did today. And if it helps appease your concern for my safety," I added with dripping sarcasm, "I will light torches and surround myself with them."

The count shrugged. "As you wish," he said. "But kindly remember that you were warned."

He was not pleased—not at all pleased—as I readily saw.

The door opened and the serving women appeared. They started to lay out the evening meal.

I called to Victoria as I picked a wedge of cheese from one of the trays. I pushed the Petrofs out of my mind purposefully. I could not afford to have the memory of their ruined bodies spoil another meal for me.

"Carolyn's still sleeping," Victoria said as she came into the room. "Are you two finished with your talk?" She reached out for my hand. I slipped the crucifix back to her when our hands touched.

"Yes, dear," I said. "Come let's eat and then I want to retire early. I have a busy day tomorrow. You're coming with me, aren't you?" I asked her.

She nodded.

I noticed that Drakula was standing to one side, studying us intently. He was plotting something. Tomorrow I'd know what it was he was plotting.

Chapter 18

Victoria Hamilton's Diary

October 14th

John is already asleep and I will force myself to do the same in a few minutes. I'm sitting with Carolyn who is resting more easily. She awoke a few minutes ago and seems stronger. She showed an appetite, which is an excellent sign. I told her about John's beginning his work, and Carolyn seemed genuinely pleased and interested.

Carolyn is under the impression that this strange fever that beset her is the cause for her unusual behavior of late. I let her believe that. I know differently. My suspicions of Count Drakula were confirmed when I noticed the tiny marks on Carolyn's throat. I shudder to think of them, yet I must think of them and be constantly on my guard until we are all out of this dreadful place.

Luckily, I found the tiny crucifix that I had given to Carolyn for protection. The count obviously threw it into a corner of the room—or influenced Carolyn to do so. Anyway, I found it. I haven't found the Bible yet but I know Drakula can not carry it or touch it, so it must be in the apartment somewhere. I'll make a more thorough search for it later on. For the time being the tiny cross will have to be our only protection.

Carolyn is sleeping soundly now. I'll leave her and

join John. I have tacked the cross above her bed. She will be safe from Count Drakula; the crucifix will see to it.

I think John is beginning to believe me as far as the vampire, Drakula, is concerned. John took the crucifix this evening without question. He kept it in his hand all the while he and the count were alone. Yes, John might possibly think my suspicions are not complete nonsense.

What did he and Drakula have to say in private? Something happened in the woods today, something John would not tell me about. Perhaps it has something to do with the women. They seem to live in that forest area. Did he come across them? If not, just what did he come across? I'll ask him tomorrow. I'll make him tell me.

Oh, how I wish we were away from this place. Carolyn may act stronger but I'm still very much afraid for her. It's obvious, at least to me, that she's under Drakula's control. We must get her out of here as soon as she's able to travel.

I hear Drakula and the women moving about in the other room. I must go to John. It seems we are safe from him just so long as we stay together.

Chapter 19

John Hamilton's Journal

October 15th

Well, now we know what the count was plotting last night. Victoria and I got up quite early. Victoria made breakfast and packed our lunch. We got ready to leave. But we didn't go far. In fact, we never left the castle.

We both panicked when we found the front door bolted from the outside. And the key was gone from the lock. We went through the old castle looking for some way out but there was none.

The castle is built on the corner of a great rock so that on three sides it is quite impregnable. To the west is a great valley, and beyond the valley, rising far away, are great jagged mountains, towering peak on peak, the sheer rock studded with mountain ash and thorn. All the rooms with windows look to the south, something I hadn't realized before. A stone falling from any window would drop thousands of feet without touching anything. As far as the eye can see, there is a sea of green treetops with an occasional deep rift where chasms cut the green. Here and there silver threads of far away rivers wind through narrow gorges.

Doors, doors, doors—everything locked and bolted. Nowhere except the windows looking south onto the

precipice is there an exit available to us. The castle is a veritable prison and we are its prisoners.

The thought of being prisoners in this terrible place really frightened us. I'm afraid I am just as unnerved as Victoria, although I am doing my best to hide it.

We rushed up and down the stairs, trying every door and peering out of every window we could find. It didn't take us very long to realize that we were helplessly trapped. Our first reaction to our helplessness was blind fear. I forced myself to stay calm, and after a while we sat quietly and began to talk over what was to be done.

This imprisonment has made me agree with Victoria on one thing. We will not talk of our plans any further with Count Drakula. He won't learn one word from me or from Victoria as to what we are doing or planning to do. He obviously is responsible for our predicament. It is his way of forcing me to include him in on my project. He is obviously a spy for the Republic. There's no doubt in my mind about that. We must keep our knowledge and our fears to ourselves, and our eyes wide open.

As I sit here looking out toward the south, I am filled with the sense of the freedom of nature, inaccessible though it is to us. Compared with the narrow darkness of the courtyard at the front of the castle, this vast freedom seems like a rare jewel set out to catch the rays of the morning sun. I remember the beauty of yesterday morning and long to breath clear, clean air, and not the musty, dank atmosphere that hangs over the inside of this old, decaying castle.

"What are we going to do?" Victoria asked clinging to me. "We must get out."

I soothed her. "We'll get out, have no fears. The count must have taken all the keys when he left. I'll demand he give them to me."

"John, I'm so frightened. He's a devil. He isn't human." Victoria started to cry.

"Now, now, Victoria. That isn't going to do anyone any good. Why not go and sit with Carolyn. I'm going to have a look downstairs and see if there isn't a basement window or something that we can crawl out through."

"Be careful," she said, drying her eyes with a corner of her handkerchief.

"I will."

She kissed me lightly on the mouth. She stood there looking fondly into my eyes and then she forced herself to smile. "There really isn't anything to fear during the day," she said softly. "He sleeps in his coffin during the day."

I gave her a look of reproach. "That'll be enough of that," I said pleasantly.

"You are beginning to believe me, aren't you, John?"

I merely hugged her to me and didn't answer for a moment or two. "I will admit one thing," I said. "There is something going on around here that isn't exactly right. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not agreeing that Drakula is a vampire. I'm just saying the man is more than he is cracked up to be. I think he's either a lunatic or a political agent of some kind. There's something, but I don't know just what it is."

I eased her away from me. "Well, I'm going to get on with my search of the basement. If I find a way out, I'll come up for you. In the meantime, stay in Carolyn's room and don't go wandering around where I won't be able to find you. You can easily get lost in this place."

"I'll stay inside the apartment upstairs," Victoria promised. "Hurry, John. Don't take too long." She

kissed me again, and I went toward the stairway that led to the cellars.

I went through the doorway under the staircase and down the long, dark flight of worn steps. I lighted the torches as I went along the dismal passage beneath the castle. At the end of the corridor the door to the room we had found earlier was still ajar. I went into the room and lit the torch just inside the door. The casket was still in the same place. I didn't notice, though, that the lid was not on top as I had left it when we first came across it. I didn't pay much attention to the coffin at all. The coffin was not my reason for coming down into the room. I was looking for windows or other doors by which to make our escape. The windows that were near the ceiling of the room, I noticed, were all outfitted with bars to prevent wild animals from creeping or flying in from the outside. There weren't any other doors in the room, except the one through which I had entered. I checked the bars on the windows and saw that they were firmly fixed; there was no possible way of dislodging them from the rocks in which they were imbedded. Reluctantly, I decided I would have to search elsewhere.

As I turned, torch in hand, and started to leave the room, my eye fell again upon the casket. I saw now that the lid was not in place. The light of the torch touched the inside of the coffin.

I stared.

There in the casket lay Count Drakula. He was neither dead nor asleep. His eyes were open and stony cold, but they did not have the glassy look of the dead. His cheeks were the color of life and his lips were red as rosebuds. He showed no signs of movement and when I searched for his pulse, I found none. There was no sign of life, breath or heartbeat.

I bent over him, trying to find some indication that he was living. There was none.

I noticed that he couldn't have been lying there in the coffin for very long because the earthy smell still lingered; it would, otherwise, have passed away in a few short hours.

I stood, shocked with fear and wonder. Suddenly a rumbling sound came from the casket. I watched the body twitch and move. A trickle of blood seeped from between the lips and the mouth seemed to puff up. Blood suddenly trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran down over the chin and the neck. The deep, burning eyes seemed to be imbedded in swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches beneath the eyes suddenly bloated. He looked completely gorged with blood. It made my stomach turn just to see the awful creature. He lay there like a filthy leech, exhausted and completely sated in his repletion.

I shivered and every fiber of me was revolted at the sight of the monster. For the first time, I put credence in Victoria's story. Drakula was a vampire. I didn't want to believe it. I couldn't believe it, but nevertheless it was true. There he lay, filled with blood, either human or animal, sleeping through the daylight hours. Suddenly things became clear in my mind. It wasn't possible, and yet I could not deny that things made more sense if one accepted the fact that Count Drakula was a vampire. He was never available during the day. He only moved about at night. He never ate food, as mortals do. Carolyn's malady was no fever. He had been draining not only her blood but her strength and her reason. It was he who had made us prisoners, and it was he who wanted to drain us as he had drained Carolyn.

Or did he? What was he waiting for? Why had he given us the latitude afforded us thus far? Why had he

kept us alive if he was only interested in the blood that flowed through our veins? He needed us for something other than our blood. But what? What?

There was a mocking smile on Drakula's bloated face which seemed to drive me mad. I didn't know what I was doing, but I did know that the count had to be destroyed.

Yet I couldn't kill. I couldn't take a life, regardless of what Drakula was, regardless of whether it was a matter of self-preservation or not.

I heard the wolves begin to howl in the distance. My blood turned to ice. There was only one thing to do. I would have to lock the count inside the room until I could get the help I would need to be rid of him.

But that would do no good, I reminded myself. If what Victoria thought—and possibly what I thought —was true, then no locked door would hold Drakula. And it wouldn't serve any purpose to nail down the lid of the casket. If I were to stop him, I would have to destroy him.

I heard an echo of his devilish laugh bounding about inside my head. A terrible desire came upon me. I would have to force myself to rid the world of this creature before he rid the world of us.

I had no weapon. I looked around the room. There in the corner lay the stake which I had yanked from his heart. I would replace it. The thought made me sick to my stomach, but I faced the fact that I had removed the stake and brought the count to life. I would return him to his deathlike state of limbo.

I picked up the stake and went back to the coffin. I placed the stake against his chest and started to lean on it. As I did, the head turned and the eyes, filled with hate, fell upon me. The sight paralyzed me for a moment. I could not look. The lips moved. The mouth

opened to speak. A gurgle came from between the lips. The blood bubbled out of his mouth.

I was shaking from head to toe. I forced my eyes shut and braced myself against the stake.

"No, John," a voice said from behind me.

I straightened. The stake dangled from my hands.

"Carolyn? How did you get down here? You should be in your bed.

"I'm feeling much better, John," she said, her voice sounding hazy and vague. "You mustn't do that, John. It will kill me too, you know," she said casually. She was staring at the seemingly lifeless body of Count Drakula, where he lay in his coffin.

I looked from the count to Carolyn. I felt torn apart by indecision.

She stood there like a statue. Her eyes were as dead and colorless as the rest of her body. It was as though she were sleepwalking.

"He must be destroyed," I breathed.

"And you will then destroy me also," Carolyn said.

"What can I do? I must release you from his power," I said, my voice rushed and urgent.

"You must not," she answered.

We heard movement in the corridor outside. Carolyn cocked her head slightly.

"John, John," Victoria called.

I heard her scurrying along the passageway. "John," she called from the other side of the door. "Carolyn's gone." She started to push her way into the room.

I didn't want Victoria to see the count. I didn't want her to have her suspicions confirmed. It was all too horrible. I had to protect her as best I could. Quickly I threw aside the stake and extinguished the torch just as Victoria pushed through the door.

"Oh, there you are, Carolyn. You gave me a fright

when I saw your bed was empty. I didn't expect to find you down here. I came for John."

"He needed me," Carolyn said in her trancelike voice.

I saw her eyes roll then, and her knees started to buckle. Just as she started to sag toward the ground, I caught her and scooped her up into my arms.

Victoria gasped.

"She's only fainted," I said. "Come on, let's get her back to bed. She shouldn't be down here in this cold and dampness."

I stood, making sure I was blocking Victoria's view of the coffin. When Victoria turned and started to lead the way back upstairs I breathed a sigh of relief. I would have to come back another time and settle up with Count Drakula. But what of Carolyn? My heart sank into my shoes.

Chapter 20

John Hamilton's Journal

October 15th

That sight in the basement; I can't get it out of my mind. What sort of creature is this Count Drakula? My mind just refuses to accept the idea that he is a vampire, as Victoria has suspected all along. Yet it must be the answer. What other type of monster is known to sleep during the day in a coffin filled with earth from his native land? What does he want with us? His intentions toward Carolyn are clear enough. But what about Victoria and me? He has hinted at more than just satisfying himself with our blood.

It is all insane. This can't be happening to us.

Victoria just came in. I can not let her see this journal, not until we are safely away from this nightmarish place.

"Carolyn wants to talk to you, John. She's awake and asking for you."

I looked at Victoria suspiciously. "Did she say anything to you about why she was downstairs, or how she got there?"

Victoria shook her head. "No. She didn't say a word. She just came to and started mumbling about wanting to see you . . . that it was important."

I sighed with relief. Victoria had to be kept from knowing about Drakula. She would only become hysterical.

"I'll go see what she wants," I said, and went into Carolyn's room.

Carolyn was lying propped up on pillows and, surprisingly enough, she was smiling broadly and looked very bright and wide awake.

"Well, you're looking much better, Carolyn," I said.

"And feeling it," she answered in a soft, delicate voice. Her eyes were bright and sparkling. Her voice was crisp and clear. She glanced at Victoria standing in the doorway. "I'm quite hungry, Victoria," she said. "Could you possibly go downstairs and fix me something to eat?"

"Of course, dear." She turned to go.

"Make it a lot, Victoria. I really am quite famished."

Victoria smiled at her. "I'll fix you a banquet fit for à queen," she said and went away.

"And now, John," Carolyn said, reaching out for me. I took her hand and sat down on the side of the bed. "I haven't thanked you for carrying me back to bed, have I?" she said in a little-girl voice.

"No thanks necessary," I said, patting her hand. "We just can't have you wandering around these drafty old hallways. You might catch cold."

I was going to ask her if she remembered anything about being in the cellar—how she got there and why she went there—but I didn't get the chance.

"Then why don't you keep me warm?" she said, raising herself up to me. She winked and looked coy.

I backed off from her. Was I imagining it, or was Carolyn flirting with me? I couldn't believe what was happening. She put her hand on my knee and her fingers started drawing tiny circles along my leg. Her other arm went around my neck and she pulled my face close to hers as her hand moved up my leg.

"Carolyn," I said sharply. "Behave yourself."

She merely giggled and began running her lips along my cheek until she reached my ear. "You must have known how I've felt about you all these years," Carolyn whispered. "Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted you to hold me like this, to feel your body hard against mine."

"Carolyn," I said, struggling to get out of her embrace. Her hands and arms seemed everywhere.

"Don't fight me, John. I know you want me. Take me, John. Love me. Kiss me. Oh John, please make love to me, please, please, please!"

My mind was whirling at a dizzying pace. I felt shocked and disgusted. This wasn't the Carolyn I knew and cared for. This wasn't Victoria's sister. This was yet another monster—a monster Count Drakula had created.

I eased myself away from her lips, her mouth, her arms, her body. She clung to me, trying desperately to press her mouth against mine. Her hair fell back and I saw the marks on her throat. My hands tightened on her arms as I held her at a distance, staring at the tiny pricks on her neck.

When I looked into her eyes, she was leering at me. She was no longer the sweet young girl whose sister I married: she wasn't the pleasant, charming young lady who had traveled with us for the past months. She was a fiend. She had the eyes, the mouth, the teeth of a fiend. When she smiled, she showed the same sharp white teeth Count Drakula showed. The same evil expression seemed rooted in her eyes. She moved her body most voluptuously, most temptingly, but the more she tried to seduce me the more disgusted, the more angry and shocked, I became with her.

"You sent Victoria away on purpose," I shouted.

She merely laughed in my face. "Of course, John. Or would you have preferred me to seduce you while Victoria was present. She doesn't frighten me, you know. No one does."

"Carolyn," I said, shaking her slightly. "You don't know what you're doing, what you're saying." I tried to get her to listen to me, but she merely smiled and tried to kiss my mouth. "We must get you away from here immediately. You must try to help yourself. Stay away from Drakula. Stay under the protection of the crucifix," I said, looking up at the cross tacked over her bed.

Carolyn glanced up at it. She recoiled when her eyes saw the tiny gold cross glinting above her. Averting her eyes, she reached up and snatched the crucifix from the wall and threw it across the room. "Take it away. Get it out of here," she yelled. "I never want to see it."

Victoria appeared in the doorway, holding a tray.

"What is it? What's happened?" she asked, her face lined with worry and concern when she saw Carolyn throw herself down on the bed and give herself up to tears.

"We must get her out of here," I said quickly. I got to my feet, my fists clenched, my nails digging into my palms. "I've got to put a stop to this, regardless of the cost."

I thought of the casket in the cellar. I looked toward the windows and saw that it was still very light. There would be no threat from Drakula for hours yet. I had to get to the cellar and do what I could to render the monster harmless.

I left Victoria and Carolyn together and rushed out of the room and down the stairs. My hand tightened on the latch of the cellar door. I yanked at it. The

door didn't move. I rattled the latch. It was locked. Someone had locked the only door that led down to that room with its insidious coffin.

Victoria! She was the only person down here. She was here when I was with Carolyn. She and she alone could have locked the door. There wasn't anyone else in the castle. But why? Why would Victoria do such a thing?

I turned and retraced my steps.

Carolyn was still collapsed in Victoria's arms. She wasn't crying now, however.

"Did you lock the cellar door?" I demanded.

Victoria turned her eyes to me. "The cellar door? Me? Why no, of course not. Why should I lock that door?"

"I didn't ask you why. I just want to know if you did or didn't." I couldn't help the fact that my nerves were suddenly frayed and unraveled. I was speaking sharply and angrily.

"I did *not* lock the door," Victoria said, just as sharply.

"Well someone locked it," I accused. "You were the only one downstairs after I carried Carolyn up here."

"I did not lock that door," Victoria insisted. She was beginning to lose her temper now I saw.

She had a right to lose her temper, I thought suddenly letting myself go limp and dropping into a chair.

"I'm sorry, Victoria," I said, rubbing my hands over my face. "I'm afraid I'm letting all of this get to me."

"I know, I know," Victoria said continuing to hold Carolyn. "It's getting to all of us." She paused and eased Carolyn back on the pillows. "Especially

Carolyn," she said, brushing stray hairs back from Carolyn's forehead.

Suddenly Carolyn threw back her head and started to laugh.

We both stared at her.

"Oh, you two should see yourselves," she mocked. "Why is everyone so glum? You should be happy. Just think, we can stay here forever and ever and never have to be afraid of anything again."

"What are you talking about?" Victoria asked.

"The count will see that we are always well taken care of."

"The count," I groaned. "That monster should be destroyed," I added an unruarded thought.

Carolyn laughed.

Victoria looked at me strangely. "You know something, John, and you're not telling me. What's going on? What's happened? You've discovered something and are keeping it from me. Why? What is it? I have a right to know."

"Don't, Victoria," I pleaded. "It's nothing."

Again Carolyn laughed. "Nothing?" She shot Victoria a meaningful look. "It's everything, Victoria. Everything."

"I don't understand," Victoria said, looking confused and flustered.

Carolyn only continued to laugh at her. "After we've all settled down here with Count Drakula, things will clear up for you, Victoria dear. Don't worry about it."

Victoria's eyes grew larger. "Settle down here? With the count? Are you serious, Carolyn? We are going to do no such thing."

"But you are," Carolyn said, grinning. "You have no other choice."

"You're talking nonsense," Victoria breathed.

I went to Victoria and put my hand on her shoulder and regarded Carolyn. "Don't listen to her, Victoria. She's only trying to upset you. She thinks she's being clever by trying to frighten you."

"Frighten me? Against what?"

"Tell her, John. She has a right to know, if she doesn't know already."

Victoria looked from one to the other of us. "Tell me what?" Suddenly her patience and her composure ran out. She got up and stamped her foot. "Will you please tell me what is going on here?"

Carolyn giggled. "I'm going to marry Count Drakula," she chirped. She looked cocky and defiant.

Victoria turned on her. "You're going to do no such thing, young lady."

"Ah, but I am," Carolyn insisted. "You can't stop me. It's too late. Nobody can stop me."

"I'll stop you if I have to chloroform you and carry you away bodily."

Carolyn laughed hysterically. She obviously found that remark quite amusing.

I could tell by looking at Carolyn that she was lost to us. There was no cure for her sort of disease. The count had made his mark, and he had taken Carolyn from us. We were too late. We couldn't save her now. The marks on her throat seemed to pulse and throb as she rocked to the tune of her obscene laughter.

Victoria suddenly flew into a rage. Carolyn's attitude, her laughter snapped Victoria's nerves. Her hand flashed out and she slapped her sister across the face. Again and again she slapped her, until Carolyn grabbed Victoria's wrist and almost twisted it off. Victoria squealed and pulled away.

Suddenly, Carolyn, her eyes like burning coals,

shoved back her hair and showed Victoria and me the marks on her neck.

"See," she leered. "These are his marks. I belong to him now. You can't take me away. You'll never take me away. I belong here. I will stay here forever. Neither you nor anyone else will ever get me to leave Count Drakula."

Victoria gasped when she saw the marks. Her eyes moved up to the wall behind the bed. She flinched. "The crucifix," she said. "It's gone."

Quickly I went to the corner of the room and retrieved it. "No," I said hurriedly. "Carolyn threw it away. She said she never wants to see it again."

"Oh, no," Victoria shouted. "You must have it, Carolyn. You must keep it with you at all times."

Carolyn cringed away from the tiny gold cross. She cringed back as I had seen Count Drakula cringe from it. Yes, I decided, Carolyn was lost to us.

Slowly Victoria turned her eyes to mine. Carolyn stayed huddled at the edge of the bed. "It's true, isn't it, John?" Victoria asked. I knew what she was referring to. I couldn't answer her. I couldn't look at her. With a bowed head, I turned and went out of the room.

Moments later I heard Carolyn start to laugh hysterically again.

Chapter 21

Victoria Hamilton's Diary

October 15th

Night will soon be upon us and Drakula will return. The mere thought of him makes my blood run cold. We are prisoners in his dreadful castle. John has said he will insist upon Drakula giving us the keys. I don't put much faith in the possibility that he will give them to us. Not Count Drakula. He intends to keep us his prisoners forever.

What I have feared most must be true. John found something in the woods yesterday which he refuses to tell me about. He spoke to the count about it last night. It was only after that discussion that our troubles seemed to come to a head.

What we are to do about Carolyn I don't know. The girl is quite unwell. I can't say she is physically sick because I can't find anything medically wrong with her. The fever has passed and she seems perfectly hale and hearty, except that she retains that ghastly pallor and is given to hysteria and ravings. Her strength and vitality seem as great as ever.

Carolyn told me that she wants John kept away from her. She claims he has tried to seduce her. The girl must still be suffering from the fit of hysteria she threw hours ago. Perhaps it is the effects of the fever. John? Seduce Carolyn? Ridiculous. I know John too well. I could never believe him unfaithful, especially

with my own sister. No, if John decided to seduce anyone, it would not be close to home. Discretion is John's middle name.

I keep thinking in circles, yet I always seem to come back to the same place. Count Drakula is not human; he is a vampire. I'm convinced of it. He has taken Carolyn, or is trying to claim her. He won't succeed. I'll fight him with my dying breath.

I think John is beginning to think as I do. There is a change in his attitude which I cannot explain. He is holding something back from me, which is very unlike John. I saw him in the sitting room a while ago, down on his hands and knees looking around under chairs and tables and couches. When I asked what he was looking for, he said he'd lost a button from his jacket. Later I examined the jacket and found no buttons missing. John was looking for the Bible, I know he was.

Night is here, I see. This nocturnal existence is beginning to tell on us all. It is destroying our nerves. I am not myself of late. I even struck Carolyn today, which I have never done in my life. I find myself afraid of my own shadow and am constantly imagining all sorts of horrible things. But surely there are grounds for my terrible fears in this gruesome place.

I'm looking out over the beauty of the expanse outside my tower window. The land is bathed in soft yellow moonlight until it is almost as light as day. In the soft light the hills seem to melt together, and the shadows in the valleys and gorges below are velvety black. The beauty of it all is some help in buoying up my spirits. For all our misery and unhappiness here, there is peace and comfort in the beauty I see before me.

Something just moved on the wall opposite the wing in which we are housed.

I can see a figure. A shape is emerging from what

seems nothing more than a wide crack in the side of the castle's outer wall.

I gasped when I recognized the shape. It was Drakula. His whole body slowly emerged from the crevice and he began to crawl down the castle wall over the treacherous precipice. He was face down with his cloak spread out around him like great wings. At first I thought the moonlight was playing tricks on me. I didn't believe my eyes. The night was casting weird shadows, I thought. But I kept looking, and I realized, after watching for a few moments that it was not an illusion. I saw the count's fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones and move down, down, down with considerable speed, much as a lizard, a rat or a bat might move down along a wall.

What a horrible man! What an ugly creature he is. I am so afraid. And there seems to be no escape for us.

I stared at the terrible shape moving down the side of the outer wall. Suddenly the cape became wings which fanned out. The feet became claws, the head grew small until it resembled that of a rat. The figure leaped from the wall.

My hands flew up over my eyes. I couldn't help myself. I screamed at the top of my lungs as the bat threw itself down into the deep precipice.

John rushed to my side and pulled me into his arms.

"Victoria. What is it? What happened?"

"Drakula," I sobbed. "The vampire." With one hand I pointed toward the wall and the precipice beneath it. "He climbed down the wall and sailed out into the gorge."

John inched toward the window and looked out. Hesitantly I uncovered my eyes and gazed at the tranquillity of the night outside.

There clinging to the side of the castle wall

opposite was a thick cluster of blue black vines. They rustled and moved in the night air.

John merely smiled and pulled me closer to him. "You are imagining things, darling. There's nothing there."

I knew what I'd seen. He wouldn't believe me. No one would.

I started to cry softly.

Chapter 22

John Hamilton's Journal

October 16th

Victoria had a bad fright. She's imagining things. Who can blame her in view of the turn of events here?

Carolyn has become a problem. She refuses to sit with us. She has locked herself in her room. She will not eat. She will speak with no one, she says, except her future husband, Count Drakula. Something must be done for her. But what?

Being prisoners as we are, Victoria and I both agreed that it would be senseless to go to bed at this hour. We must confront Count Drakula. It is well after midnight and he has still not shown himself. His absence only makes me shudder at the thought of the dastardly business he is about out there in the night.

Ah, here he is at last.

"I trust you will forgive me, my friends," Drakula said as he joined us, "But I have much work to do in private this night. You will, I hope, find all things as you wish." He didn't wait for us to answer. He started to leave us.

"One moment, Count Drakula," I said firmly. "There are certain things that will have to be straightened out. We must speak with you."

The count waved me off. "Not now, my friend. I am too busy."

"Now," I demanded.

The count reared. His eyes bore into me like twin rays of searing heat. Then I saw his gaze falter, as though he'd suddenly remembered something that prevented him from releasing his wrath.

"Very well," he said curtly. "What is it you wish to speak to me about?"

"The castle is locked and bolted. We can not get out," I told him. "If you want me to complete my project for your government, you will have to hand over the keys. I can not very well work here inside the castle."

"Your work can wait for a few days," the count said. "In the meantime, I prefer that you remain indoors. The woods are dangerous, as I told you and as you yourself found out. I have locked you inside for your own safety."

"I believe we can decide what should be done to insure our safety," I told him. "Locking us up like common criminals is hardly my idea of protection."

"I have my reasons for keeping you inside," he said boldly.

I had thought that I would be frightened of him when we came face to face, knowing what he is, but I found my courage getting stronger and stronger. I remembered that bloated leechlike creature lying downstairs in his coffin and I knew the horrible threat he held for the world. He had to be destroyed. He had to be fought. I felt I could stand up to him. He would not intimidate me. I would not let him.

"I know your secret, Drakula," I said brazenly. "I have seen with my own eyes."

Victoria clutched my arm. She stared up at me. Her eyes told me of the fear that lay deep inside her. I couldn't tell whether or not she completely understood what I was saying, but the count understood. I

could tell by looking at him that he knew very well what I was referring to.

"I would be careful if I were you, John Hamilton," he threatened. "Do not mix into something you know nothing about."

"I am not afraid of you, Drakula."

To my surprise he laughed. "I am glad of that," he said. He hesitated, studied me for a moment, then said, "I will give you the keys and your freedom if you will grant me one favor."

"And what might that be?" I asked haughtily.

He chuckled again. "Wait upon me for one hour. I will return with my request."

Victoria put her face close to mine. "Don't trust him, John," she whispered.

"One hour? You will be back then?"

"You will wait?" Drakula asked.

"Yes," I said.

He nodded and vanished.

"What is this all about?" Victoria asked, her voice tight with fear. "I'm so confused. You are all keeping me in the dark. Tell me what is going on."

"I think the count will explain everything when he returns," I said. I looked deep into her eyes as my arms enfolded her. "You look tired, darling. Why don't you go to bed. You could use some rest."

"No, I want to hear what you and Drakula have to say to one another." Victoria hesitated as she snuggled against me. "He is a vampire, isn't he, John?"

There was no reason to mystify her any further, yet I could not bring myself to tell her the truth. She would have to know in time. I couldn't keep her in the dark forever. Drakula would make it all too clear when he returned, I was sure of that. Perhaps it might be best if Victoria did know the truth so that she could be on her guard at all times.

"I don't know," I hedged. "I think perhaps. . . ."

I felt Victoria stiffen and press herself closer to me. "Oh, John. What are we going to do?"

"We'll just have to wait for Drakula before I can answer that," I said.

And we waited.

Within the hour Drakula was back. In his hand he carried two sheets of paper.

"Read these and then sign them," he commanded. "You will know everything after you have read them. And after you have affixed your signatures, you will be free to go wherever you wish, whenever you wish."

Victoria crowded next to me as I took the papers.

They were letters. Two letters.

"You will, of course, fill in the proper addresses where necessary," the count said.

On a scrap of paper clipped to the first letter was written:

TO THE ATTORNEYS OF JOHN HAMILTON,
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

Gentlemen:

Please be informed and advised that I, John Hamilton, hereby appoint and designate the bearer of this letter, COUNT F. S. DRAKULA, my true and legal attorney. Count Drakula is hereby granted permission to act as my agent in all affairs on my behalf. It is my wish that Count Drakula be given my power of attorney. The count, together with whomsoever he may wish to mention, is to be given access to my house and property located at ————————, Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. He may maintain occupancy of said premises for as long as he wishes

without making payment in any amount for the occupancy of said property. All expenses incurred in the upkeep of the property will be assumed by me, and Count Drakula is to be given power of attorney for my checking accounts as well as the power to act in my behalf in all other matters, financial or otherwise.

On this day I hereby affix my hand and seal.

Dated: _____ _____
John Hamilton

Attested to:

_____
Victoria Hamilton

"You're mad," I snarled, throwing the letter aside. "You can't hope that I'll sign such a ridiculous document? Never!"

The count merely smiled. "I think you will," he said. There was a fiendish leer on his lips. His sharp white teeth glistened in the light of the fireplace.

"Never," I insisted.

Victoria clung to me and said nothing.

The count motioned to the second letter. "Read the other letter," he insisted.

This letter made things clearer in my mind. After reading it, I knew exactly what Drakula's intentions were.

To the International Geophysical Society,
Rumanian Chapter, Bucharest
Gentlemen:

My project in the Carpathian Mountains is nearing completion. I am writing to request that you grant permission to have removed from your

fine country certain crates and boxes of earth samples, which I would like shipped to the United States of America. The boxes will contain nothing but earth and rocks, and they will be destined for my laboratories in America where I will be able to examine them more thoroughly. The equipment I have brought here to Rumania with with me is not completely adequate for a thorough and detailed analysis.

There will be an estimated five or six crates in all, measuring approximately two by three by six feet. The parcels will be appropriately labeled and addressed.

As you will see when my final report is submitted, the work is far from finished. There is yet much that must be investigated before any definite findings can be reached.

I trust you will forward your permission for shipment of these parcels at your earliest possible convenience so that I may return to my country and continue toward completion of this vital work.

Sincerely,

Dated _____ _____
John Hamilton

I knew only too well what Drakula wanted to transport to the United States, to our home there. It was not only his precious soil, it was his corpse, as well as the corpses of his serving women, or perhaps Carolyn, Victoria, and myself.

My blood ran cold.

"Never," I said, throwing the papers back at him.

"Do what you wish, Drakula. I'll never put my signature to those documents. Never."

"No?" the count asked haughtily, arching his eyebrows and looking at me with threatening eyes. "But I insist that you do, Dr. Hamilton. Otherwise. . . ."

"Otherwise, what?" I shouted.

The count merely smiled. "If you care about your family, you will sign these letters."

"I demand to know precisely what you mean by that statement," I said. "Kindly clarify. What exactly do you mean by threatening my wife, my sister-in-law and myself?"

"There are things that can be done that would curdle your blood, sir," the count said, chuckling over the word "blood". "Surely you know my powers, doctor. I would not suggest you try my patience. I am not a patient man."

"Damn your patience!" I swore. "Do what you think you can to me. I'll never sign those letters."

"I think you will," the count insisted. He turned and looked at Victoria. "Do you endorse your husband's decision, my dear?" he asked her.

Victoria said nothing. She just stood there, clinging to me, too frightened to speak.

"Of course she does," I insisted. "And so does Carolyn."

The count laughed. "But surely you know that Carolyn hasn't the power to agree or disagree about anything if I do not wish it."

Victoria's hand tightened on my arm.

I patted her and whispered, "It isn't too late, Victoria. Just stand with me. He can't hurt any of us."

The count shrugged and started to leave. "Well, if I cannot persuade you in one way, then perhaps we will

have to resort to other methods." At the doorway, he stopped and turned back to us. Again I could see that he was plotting something.

He grinned at us. "Let me advise you," he said, "no, let me warn you, in all seriousness. Do not leave your rooms. If you have occasion to leave them, you must not under any circumstances sleep in any other part of this castle." He laughed. "It is old, as you know, and has many umpleasant memories. There are bad dreams for those who sleep unwisely. Be warned. Should sleep now or ever seem likely to overcome you, then make haste back to your own bedroom or to these sitting rooms, for your rest will be safe here. But if you are not careful in this respect and do not take my warning seriously. . . ." He didn't finish. He gestured with his hands, as if he were washing them.

I looked at Victoria and she at me. He was warning us, but for what reason? We didn't doubt him about bad dreams. Our only doubt was as to whether any dream could be more terrible than the unnatural, horrible net of gloom and mystery which seemed to be closing in around us.

Drakula disappeared.

"What do you think he was referring to?" Victoria asked.

"I have a feeling he was trying to scare us into not leaving these rooms. There's something going on in this castle at night. Perhaps if we catch him at whatever it is, we can put a stop to him without bringing any harm to ourselves, especially to Carolyn."

Victoria seemed to take courage. "We mustn't be afraid of him, John," she said bravely. "Drakula is afraid of the crucifix. I'll keep it with us always." Then she started to look around. "If only we could find my Bible," she said in a rush, starting to move

furniture and look under scarves and doilies. I started to search with her.

Suddenly we heard a low, frightening moan. It was coming from Carolyn's room. We both froze.

"Carolyn," I breathed.

Quickly I rushed to Carolyn's door. I tried the handle, but it was locked. Carolyn continued to moan on the other side of the door.

"Carolyn," I shouted, pounding on the door with my fists. But I knew she wouldn't answer—or couldn't. I also knew we wouldn't find her alone. *He* was with her—Drakula! I was struck with blinding horror.

I put my shoulder to the heavy wood panels and banged with all my might. My strength alone wasn't enough to break down the door. We had to reach Carolyn. We had to save her in spite of herself.

Quickly Victoria and I positioned the heavy refectory table in front of the door. We both got behind it and used it as a battering ram. Once . . . twice. . . . The door was beginning to splinter. With a mighty push, we knocked the door from its hinges.

I rushed into the bedrooom. Drakula was bending over Carolyn. His mouth was on her neck.

I grabbed his shoulder and spun him around. Blood was dripping from the corners of his mouth.

Victoria screamed.

My fist pounded into his face, knocking him backward. Drakula growled at me. Then he lunged for me. His hands were like vulture's claws, his mouth like the jaws of a hungry beast. He started for me, and as he did, he changed from a human into an animal. He was a vicious wolf. His skin turned into gray fur; his teeth were longer, whiter, sharper. His eyes were a wolf's eyes, his feet and hands became paws, their

nails honed and deadly. He was crouched, readying himself for a spring at my throat.

Victoria stepped boldly in front of me and held up the tiny cross.

The wolf whimpered and snarled. It backed into a corner. It stayed there for a moment, growling low in its throat, gnashing its teeth at us. Victoria stood her ground. She held the cross high.

"Light the candle and throw the reflection of the cross across the creature," she said, her voice tiny and frightened.

I did as she asked. The moment the shadow of the cross fell on the beast, we heard it yelp and bolt out through the tower window. We knew that beyond the window was nothing, only a sheer drop to the floor of the gorge miles below. We both rushed to the window, leaned on the sill and looked out. Far, far below us we saw the wings of a huge bat circling. Then it flew high into the sky and was silhouetted against the moon. It soared up and around the towers of the castle. And then it seemed to disappear.

Victoria collapsed in my arms. I carried her to the bed and placed her beside Carolyn. I took the tiny gold cross from her hand and fixed it above the bed. Carolyn, too, was unconscious.

I remembered Victoria's Bible. I rushed back into the sitting room and began overturning furniture, upsetting tables, chairs, sofas. I pulled the rugs and furs up from the floor. I yanked down tapestries and draperies. I shoved the huge divan away from the wall and pitched it over.

I stopped. I stared. There against the wall was Victoria's Bible. I'd found it! I'd found it!

We would beat Drakula yet, I vowed, as I snatched up the Bible and carried it into Carolyn's bedroom. I threw myself down on the chaise longue, determined

to spend the night. I knew I would never be able to sleep, not after what had happened. But I had to try. I had to be fresh and wide awake tomorrow. Tomorrow I would have to destroy Count Drakula, regardless of the price that would have to be paid.

But what of Drakula's strange warning? Perhaps I should be up and about, wandering in search of the fiend and his evil serving women.

Before I could decide, I heard a screeching sound outside the window. I turned and saw a monstrous bat flapping its wings and grinding its sharp white teeth together. It hovered mere feet from where I lay. Then it started to move toward me.

Unconsciously I shielded my face with the Bible. I heard the bat screech, and it flapped its wings more frantically and then vanished into the night.

I fell back, sweat beading my brow. Tomorrow may be too late to save us all, I thought. We had the night to get through before I could plan on any tomorrows.

Idly my fingers riffled through the pages of the book in my lap. I stopped at a page and looked at it. My lips moved over the words:

> "Rescue me from persecutors
> stronger than I am!
> Free me from this imprisonment,
> and I will thank your name once more
> in the Assembly of the virtuous,
> for the goodness you show me."

I read the words again, and then I looked up and spoke them aloud.

Suddenly everything seemed stilled. The night air ceased to move. The sounds of the night disappeared. The Bible felt heavier.

I nodded; my eyes drooped with sleep.

The book dropped to the floor beside me. The soft thud it made hitting the carpet caused me to glance down. It lay open. There, staring up at me, were the words:

"BUT THE END WILL NOT BE YET."

Chapter 23

John Hamilton's Journal

October 16th

I dozed with those words spinning around inside my head: "BUT THE END WILL NOT BE YET."

Victoria and Carolyn are still asleep.

What was that? I heard a noise outside in the sitting room. I got up from the chaise and went to investigate. The room was in a shambles, and I remembered my frantic search for the Bible. Nothing moved. No one was there. The room was as I had left it—its furnishings strewn about like driftwood on a forgotten beach.

The Bible. I'd left it on the floor beside the chaise. I'd better keep it with me. I started back to retrieve it, but before I turned back toward Carolyn's room I heard the noise again. It sounded as though someone were laughing out in the corridor. Then I heard someone say: "John. If you want to escape, do it now."

I wasn't sure that was precisely what the voice had said, so I opened the door to the corridor and went out.

No one. Yet again I heard the words coming from the opposite end of the long, dark hallway. "If you want to escape, do it now. Do it now. Here, John. This way."

Suddenly there came to my mind the count's strange warning about staying within the rooms of

our apartment. I smiled to myself, taking pleasure in the fact that I could disobey that warning. The voice was possibly some strange spirit of good that had come to save us. The count obviously knew the spirit would come and wanted to frighten us into not following it.

My smile broadened. I started down the corridor in the direction the voice was leading me. The sense of sleep was on me, yet I went along the hall, hoping against hope that I would find a way out.

At the end of the corridor a doorway led out onto a portico that ran along the second story of the castle. I stepped out under it.

The soft moonlight soothed me. The wide expanse beyond the covered walkway tempted me, it reminded me of freedom, which was a refreshing thought. I didn't want to return to the gloomy, haunted rooms of Drakula's castle.

The voice again.

At the end of the promenade was still another doorway. I tried the latch. The door swung easily on its hinges. I found myself in a wing of the castle not familiar to me. From the windows I could see a suite of rooms directly opposite with candles burning in it. It was obviously the suite to which Victoria, Carolyn and I had been assigned. I thought of Carolyn and Victoria sleeping in those rooms. Then I remembered the cross and the Bible that I'd left with them and I wasn't afraid for them, although I reminded myself that I should be afraid for myself.

The suite of rooms in which I found myself was most elaborate. The walls were covered in a damask floral print. Lacework hung everywhere. The furniture was most delicate, the appointments very feminine. I thought perhaps that this portion of the castle had been occupied by the ladies of bygone days. The

whole suite seemed to have more of an air of comfort about it than I'd seen anywhere else in the castle. I wondered idly why the Petrofs hadn't chosen these rooms for our accommodations. They were far more spacious and much more inviting looking than those we were in.

The windows were curtainless and yellow moonlight flooded in through the diamond-shaped panes. The diffused light served to soften the wealth of dust that lay over everything and disguised the ravages of time, moths, rats and other creatures that took over where humans ceased to live.

But in spite of the beauty of the rooms, there was a very definite sense of loneliness in the place. It chilled me and made my nerves stand on edge.

There was, I noticed, a small diary and a pen lying on a nearby writing table. Both were covered with dust. I sat down at the little oak desk and glanced at the open page of the diary. I started. I stared. There, written in what seemed to be fresh ink, were the words "BUT THE END WILL NOT BE YET."

God preserve my sanity, I prayed, shoving the book aside.

Suddenly I felt an unnatural drowsiness come over me. It dropped on me like a net. I couldn't shake it off. I remembered the count's warning, yet I felt I should defy that warning. I did not want to return to my bedroom. I needed to sleep, and I felt as though I wanted to sleep here in this room filled with memories of women possibly long dead and forgotten. Women who longed for companionship.

I pulled a couch out from its place near the wall and lay down on it. What happened then I cannot say for sure because I am not positive I was awake. Possibly it was a dream. I prefer to think that it was.

A dream? God, no! Not a dream, a nightmare!

I was not alone. The room was the same but something had been added to it. Three women, all in white, were standing opposite me. I thought at first they were the serving women. I couldn't understand where they had come from or how they had gotten into this room. I noticed that the only footprints showing on the dusty floor were those I had made. There were no other footprints.

And the women threw no shadows. They were visions. Surely they weren't real.

Then they started toward me. They were smiling and looked at me, whispering among themselves. There was something about their eyes that made me think of Count Drakula. They had piercing eyes that glowed red and orange and yellow, like molten sapphires. All three were beautiful, beautiful beyond description. Their teeth were a brilliant white, their voluptuous lips the color of rubies.

I felt a sudden longing for them, and yet I felt afraid. There was something in their expression that filled me with deadly fear. Suddenly I felt still another sensation, a sensation as real and as natural as life itself. My blood started to throb and pulse and boil in my veins. My muscles grew tense and thick and tight. My heart started to pound. I flushed hot all over and my arms ached for their embraces, my mouth drooled for the taste of their lips. A feeling of wickedness and evil filled me, and I gave myself up to it. I tried to think of Victoria, but she seemed miles away. My thoughts seemed to darken and Victoria vanished in a blur.

The women came closer. They seated themselves beside me and began caressing my face, my shoulders, my arms, my legs, my body. I shuddered with desire

and need. I wanted to escape them and yet I didn't. I knew I was being lecherous, but I couldn't help myself.

They were whispering together, and then they were laughing and I was swept up into their laughter. I drifted, as though without weight or feeling, through the silvery threads of that mystical laughter that seemed to sway and swirl through the room.

Then I felt myself falling, falling back onto the couch.

"Go ahead," I heard one of the women say. "You go first and we will follow you."

"Yes, yes," the other urged. "You have the right to go first."

"Isn't he young and handsome?" the one said.

They all agreed, cooing and shaking their heads coquettishly.

"There is enough man here for all of us," one said.

I lay quiet, looking, waiting, wondering, wanting.

The tallest of the three stepped closer and bent over me until I could feel the movement of her breath upon my face. Her breath was like the fragrance of an April flower, so sweet and soft and tantalizing. Every nerve in my body tingled as she caressed me with her breath, her lips, her mouth.

Suddenly I stiffened. Her breath changed. It took on a bitter, offensive quality. It smelled of dried blood. I tried to move away. Then the other two women came over me. I felt their arms, their hands, their lips, caressing every part of me. I tried to escape them. They all smelled of blood. I wanted to be away.

I couldn't move. I was trapped, held fast where I lay.

They knelt beside me and gloated. They had a deliberate voluptuousness that was both thrilling and repulsive. They licked their lips like animals, as they

moved their mouths over my flesh. Moisture glistened from their lips as the soft moonlight played and danced over their faces.

Lower, lower their mouths and lips came. Then their tongues traveled to my chin, my neck, my throat. My flesh tingled as I felt their teeth nibble and play with my skin. Their fingers tickled me, their hands roamed over me. I felt the soft, shivering touch of their mouths on the sensitive areas of my throat.

I jerked when I felt the sharp stab of pain. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and resigned myself to the erotic sensations that coursed through my body.

Suddenly I broke out of my stupor and came back to full consciousness. I heard still another voice—the voice of Count Drakula. He was talking to the women. He was laughing at me.

Then it all became vague and cloudy.

Again I felt hands on me. They gripped my shoulders and shook me violently.

"No, no. Let me alone," I moaned.

"John, wake up. You're having a nightmare," Victoria said anxiously.

The room was different. I was in my own bed. I was naked and noticed that the sun was just beginning to sink below the horizon.

"Victoria! How did I . . . ?" I didn't finish my question. I didn't want to think of what had happened. I felt strange, very strange indeed. My head felt lighter, my body felt more rested. I felt less afraid.

"What time is it?" I asked Victoria without looking at her. I knew I should feel shame for what I had done, or what I thought I had done, but I did not.

"It will be night soon. We have all slept through the entire day I'm afraid."

I merely nodded. She handed me a cup of coffee.

"Here, take this. You look dreadful, John. You slept badly, I'm afraid."

Again I merely nodded and sipped the coffee. The heat of it seemed to give me new life.

"John? What are we going to do about getting out of here?" Victoria asked. "We must get out or sign those letters."

I said nothing.

"You aren't thinking of signing those letters, are you?"

I shook my head and shrugged. "I don't know. Perhaps."

"Perhaps? John, you can't! We'd be importing Drakula to America. You know what his intentions are, don't you?"

"But what else can I do?" I asked helplessly, suddenly feeling that all the fight had gone out of me. I felt so very weak.

"I don't know," Victoria answered. "But we mustn't sign those papers."

"We will have to if we ever intend getting out of here alive."

"There must be another way. There must," Victoria insisted.

"There is no other way," I told her. "We will have to do as he says."

I remembered more vividly the details of last night —especially my dream—and I shivered. I pulled the bedclothes up around my nakedness and felt the burning sensations rush through me. "Yes, I think we should sign those letters. It is for the best," I said as I finished off the coffee.

"For the best? John, surely you can't be serious."

"I am being serious, very serious," I told her.

Victoria was looking hard at me.

"Look," I started. "If we don't sign the letters, Dra-

kula will do with us as he sees fit. He'll destroy us, more than likely. If we do sign," I argued, "then chances are we'll be allowed to go."

"But go where?" Victoria asked. "We'd have no place to go. Drakula will take up residence in our house. He'll take over our lives and if we are free of him, we will have no other recourse but to wander aimlessly about." She dropped into a convenient chair. She ran her hands through her hair, then covered her face. "Oh, John, he won't let us off the hook now. If we are free to wander about, he knows very well that we'll find him in America and destroy him. No, he'll never let us go. We are on to his game. We know too much. He'll keep us under his thumb forever."

"Then we should do as he asks," I heard myself saying. It wasn't me speaking, it was someone else. Oh, it was my voice all right, but the words were coming out without my having any power over them. It was as though someone else were inside my body talking for me.

"Look, Victoria," I again heard myself say. "Let's sign the letters and then we will lock ourselves in our rooms until Drakula has gone on his merry way. After that we will follow him to America, and when he least expects it we will put an end to him by driving a stake back through his heart."

There were a thousand loopholes in the plan, all of which I saw immediately, but surprisingly enough Victoria accepted the plan without question. She even seemed excited by it. She was obviously snatching at straws.

What devilish power was taking possession of both of us? We weren't ourselves. We were playing into Drakula's hands. Someone was pulling strings and we were dancing at his direction.

Drakula suddenly seemed to materialize in the

doorway. Victoria didn't seem as startled as she had been on previous nights.

Drakula looked at me. His eyes on my body made me feel even more naked. I pulled the night clothes tighter about me.

"Well, doctor. I see you have overslept. You must be up, sir, and about your business." Drakula laughed softly. He reached inside his cloak and pulled out the letters. "Have you and your dear wife reached a decision, doctor?"

I nodded.

"Then pull on your robe and get to the writing desk. These letters must be signed without delay. I must forward the one to the International Geophysical Society immediately. Come, come, doctor." He glanced at Victoria. "Bring your husband his robe, my dear." Drakula grinned.

Victoria obeyed without a word. She helped me into the dressing gown and I went to the desk. Drakula handed me a pen. He spread the first letter, the power of attorney, flat on the desk before me. I did not bother to reread the document. I filled in the name and address of our attorney, penned in the address of our residence, and then I scrawled my signature on the line at the bottom. I then handed the pen to Victoria, and she attested to my signature and dated the letter.

Next the letter to the I.G.S. was set before me. Without hesitating, I scrawled my signature. The count chuckled softly, folded the letters, placed them in envelopes and tucked them inside his cloak.

"You did very well, doctor. And you too, my dear," he said, bowing to us. "And now I must leave you for a while. I will return shortly. I must dispatch the letters to Bucharest and Los Angeles." He looked from me to Victoria. "If you intend leaving tonight,"

he said, "I would heartily suggest you get yourselves ready. A meal has been laid out for you. Fill yourselves, as it is a long, cold trip down the mountains. I have arranged for a horse and closed carriage to be available in the stable."

He vanished.

Victoria and I stood there looking at each other. Suddenly we both felt lighter than air. Victoria started to laugh.

"We can leave, John. We can leave," she shouted, throwing herself into my arms.

I held her tight and refused to think about the women in my dream, about the night I'd spent in the other part of the castle.

Someone called my name. I went cold with fear, thinking it was the same voice that had lured me into my dream. But no, this was another voice, a softer, gentler voice.

"John. Victoria."

"It's Carolyn," Victoria said in a rush. She ran from the room, I at her heels.

Carolyn was sitting up in bed. In her hands was the Bible I had dropped on the floor. When Victoria saw it, she snatched it up and kissed it. She handed it to me and I did the same without realizing what I was doing.

I felt like a new man.

"Carolyn. We are leaving. Do you feel strong enough to travel?" Victoria asked.

"Yes," she said weakly and with great effort. "Help me to get away," she pleaded.

She was even whiter than before. Her words were slow and faltering. "I found the Bible," she stammered. "I saw it on the floor and it seemed to call out to me. When I touched it, I called out to you. It was as if it were speaking for me . . . urging me to call you, to help you . . . both of you."

"Hush, hush," Victoria cooed. "Save your strength, dear. We'll be out of here before long."

The next hour was spent hastily throwing things together. I didn't give any thought to my project, my equipment, the reports for I.G.S. All I cared about was getting far away from Castle Drakula as fast as possible.

My dream was suddenly a thing of the past. I only vaguely remembered signing the letters, yet I knew that I had. It made no difference now. We would get out and would deal with Drakula at another time.

We were sitting huddled together in front of the fire when Drakula returned to us. He looked tired, winded, as though he had traveled a great distance.

"You are ready, I see," he said amiably.

"Yes," Victoria answered for us. "We've also taken the liberty of trying the doors. They are still locked," she said coolly.

"But my dear," the count said, grinning in that evil way he had. "You obviously have not tried them within the past few minutes. Come along. I have arranged everything. You are free to go if you so desire."

"Nothing would keep us here," I said harshly.

The count chuckled. "If you wish to leave, doctor, as I said, you are free to do so. If you wish to stay until morning, however, I will be more than happy to accommodate you."

"No. We will leave tonight. Now."

"As you wish." He bowed low and motioned toward the stairway down to the lower floor and to the main door that led to the courtyard.

Outside the walls we heard the howling of the wolves.

We went down the long, dirty stairway slowly. Carolyn was so weak she could barely manage to

place one foot before the other. I finally swooped her up into my arms and carried her down to the front door. Victoria was first to reach the massive door. To her surprise, as well as to ours, it was unlocked. She looked back at me in happy surprise.

"You will not change your minds and remain?" the count said, smiling maliciously.

I did not bother to answer him. I motioned for Victoria to lead the way. The count bowed again and stepped aside. We went out into the courtyard.

Just outside, clustered around the bottom of the steps that led down to the carriage, was a pack of horrible, hungry wolves. They howled and champed their teeth and clawed their paws in the dirt. They snarled and growled at us, their red jaws drooping, drooling for the taste of our flesh.

Victoria screamed as the wolves got ready to spring for our throats.

We swung back inside the castle and slammed the door shut just as the pack threw themselves against it, howling and snarling out their rage.

Count Drakula was standing on the stairs smiling. There was nothing but diabolical wickedness in his expression.

"We will wait until morning," I said hatefully.

Slowly we turned and made our way back to our rooms. As we climbed the stairs, Drakula started to laugh loud and hideously.

Chapter 24

John Hamilton's Journal

October 17th

We've locked ourselves in. Drakula thwarted our escape again. The wolves are his doing, I know it. We've resigned ourselves to stay the night. Carolyn is in her room. She collapsed from exhaustion. Poor Carolyn. I only hope she will be saved once we get away from Drakula's horrible influence.

I can't get the thought of those damaging letters out of my head. I wish now that we had never signed them. I wonder what made me do it? Perhaps we should put an end to Count Drakula here and now before we leave this place. That way he would not be able to harm us in any way.

I sat rereading what I just wrote in this journal and my mind became suddenly active. We can't leave first thing in the morning! We have to destroy Drakula before we take off. It has to be done!

But how?

"Victoria?" I said hesitantly.

She turned from her diary and smiled at me.

"We must destroy Drakula," I said ominously.

She nodded. "Yes, I know we must."

"Tomorrow," I said. My voice was low and firm.

I saw Victoria flinch. She got up from the desk. "Tomorrow?" Her eyes were suddenly large with fear. "But. . . ."

"I know, I know," I answered sadly. "It means that we will either have to brave the wolves tomorrow night or remain still another day. But we must wait for sundown tomorrow and then drive the stake back through Drakula's heart."

"Oh, John. Should we take that chance? Staying here another day might mean—"

"I know perfectly well what it might mean, Victoria, especially as far as Carolyn is concerned, but I'm afraid it can't be helped. I don't know what got into me tonight to make me sign those letters, but that alone makes it necessary for us to stay here and undo the harm we've already done."

"But Drakula has already arranged for the delivery of those letters."

I shrugged. "That can be easily rectified. I'll explain once we have done away with Drakula."

"But how do you propose to destroy Drakula?" Victoria asked. "We cannot get access to him during the day. The door to the cellar is locked and bolted. He is beyond our reach."

"I know. That's why we will have to wait until sundown. Just as he emerges from the cellar we must catch him unawares and drive a spike through his heart."

"He is too cautious for that, John. We'll never get close enough to him. He'll suspect."

I rubbed my chin. Victoria might be right.

Victoria sagged. "Too bad we can't think of some way in which we could get to him while he was still sleeping."

Suddenly I jumped up, snapping my fingers. "I have an idea," I said hurriedly. "It might work."

"What?" Victoria asked excitedly.

"Earthquake," I said dramatically.

"Earthquake?"

"Yes. I'll create an earthquake." My mind, having latched onto a plan started speeding along on the momentum of the idea.

"John, talk sense. How can you *create* an earthquake?"

"The same way I did yesterday out in the woods. I planted explosives."

Victoria touched my arm. "I don't understand."

"It's really very simple, Victoria. I wonder why I didn't think of it when we had our chance during the day."

"What are you talking about? Tell me."

"Well," I said, feeling excitement racing through me. "There are multiple underground springs and streams beneath this castle. I found that out when I set charges near the foot of the mountain. If I plant deep charges of dynamite, I will be able to rock this castle sufficiently to unhinge the doors, or at least jar them loose enough to get through them."

"But isn't there the danger of the whole castle coming down around our heads?"

"I'll be careful not to set off that much of an explosion. I'll plant just enough dynamite to dislodge the doors at the lower levels."

"But John, do you really think it might work?"

"It's got to." I pounded my fist into the palm of my hand. "It's just got to work, that's all," I said.

"And then what do we do?" Victoria asked.

"As you may have guessed, Victoria. I found Drakula's coffin."

She merely nodded. "It's the same one we found that first day here. The one down in the cellar. I knew it was," she said softly.

I looked contrite. "I suppose the whole thing is my fault for removing the stake from the skeleton."

Victoria tried to console me. "You can't be blamed,

John. Who would have thought that the Drakula legend was actually true?"

"You thought so," I said, smiling fondly at her.

Victoria looked uncomfortable. "You actually saw him lying in the coffin. Was he flesh and blood or just bones?"

"He looked just as he does now except he wasn't breathing," I told her. "He was just lying there. His eyes were opened, but I couldn't find a pulse or heartbeat."

"But why didn't you destroy him then? Surely you knew what he was."

"That's when Carolyn came down to me. She said that if I destroyed Drakula I would also destroy her."

"Oh no. What are we going to do? How can we save Carolyn and destroy the count?"

"Perhaps it was Drakula speaking through Carolyn. I don't think it's too late to save Carolyn. She isn't completely drained of her strength. She can still fight him. She showed us that when she picked up the Bible and called to us. I think we still have time to save her if Drakula is destroyed at once."

"You may be right," Victoria said. I saw her look curiously at my neck. She didn't say anything for a moment, but I thought I saw a look of shock on her face. Suddenly she averted her eyes from me. "Then we must stay and do as you say," she said. "Even if it means. . . ."

I took her into my arms. "It won't mean anything, Victoria. Don't worry. I will get to work first thing in the morning. We will be away before the sun goes down."

"Before the sun goes down? Will it take that long?"

"No, I don't think so, but that all depends on what I find when I start drilling the deep wells for the charges."

Victoria kissed me hard on the mouth. "You'll save us, I know you will, John," she said lovingly. "We'll be out of here tomorrow."

"Today," I corrected, smiling down as I glanced at my watch.

I eased her away from me. "Now, why don't you try to get some rest. I'll stay up and keep guard. Are you sure Carolyn is all right?"

"Yes, I just checked on her a little while ago. She's sleeping soundly enough. Her door is open so that we can see if anything or anybody tries to get near her."

"Get some rest, Victoria. We have a long day ahead of us."

"It's you who should rest, John. I can sleep when daylight breaks. You will have to do the work. Why don't you try and close your eyes for a few hours."

I was tempted. I was so tired. Maybe I would try to sleep for a while, I thought. I didn't feel like talking any more to Victoria; not just now. I was afraid she would see my fears. Planting explosives was a dangerous thing to do inside a crumbling building. I was taking a desperate chance with our lives. It was all too possible that the entire building would come down on top of us, burying us forever.

Yet it had to be done. It was worth the risk. If it meant our deaths, at least we would be taking Drakula with us. Yes, it was worth the chance we would have to take.

Chapter 25

Victoria Hamilton's Diary

October 17th

Wolves. There seem to be hundreds upon hundreds of them. They are still howling in the courtyard. I'm afraid only the dawn will silence them, but dawn is still hours away from us.

What a horrible night this has been. The only thing that keeps our spirits up is the fact that tomorrow we will be gone from this accursed place.

Or will we? John has a plan, and I think he's right. We must destroy Drakula and his ghastly cohorts before we leave. It would erase all chances of Drakula's claiming us or others in the future. And it will save Carolyn. Yet I do not relish the idea of spending another day in this castle.

And what made us sign those strange, terrifying letters? I only vaguely remember any of it. But as John said, we can straighten out all of that as soon as we are back home.

Will those wolves never stop?

John has fallen asleep I see, despite his resolve to remain awake all night. He insisted that we should lock ourselves in tonight. I affixed the crucifix on the door to the corridor to make sure we would be protected from Drakula and his fiendish women.

John doesn't realize that he's been victimized by them. He has two tiny pricks on his throat. Drakula

and the women have gotten to him. I can only wonder when it will be my turn. Perhaps I can last the night, and tomorrow we will be away and safe from the vampire's bite. How many attacks must one suffer at the hands of a vampire before he becomes a vampire himself? Carolyn still clings between her two worlds. I think if she can last until tomorrow, she will be all right. I hope and pray so.

Sitting here, I have just noticed that there are some kind of quaint little specks floating in the rays of the oil lamp. They're like tiny grains of dust whirling round and round, gathering in clusters in a nebulous sort of way. As I watch them I feel a sort of soothing feeling coming over me. A marvelous sort of calm is gradually stealing through me. These floating motes of dust seem to take on new shapes constantly as they dance and prance about in the light.

I'm finding it hard to stay awake. I mustn't look at them. I can feel myself struggling . . . I'm being hypnotized . . . I must look away. Look away!

Quicker and quicker the dust particles are dancing about. They keep gathering, gathering until the room seems filled with them. Clouds of them are billowing up all around me. I feel trapped.

I must have dozed while writing the above. I have no idea how long I might have slept, whether for an hour or only for a second or two. But finally I started, wide awake and in full possession of my senses, and bolted from the room. The strange clouds of dust followed me. They gradually began to take shape. Out of them came the ghostly serving women. I rushed into Carolyn's room and huddled next to her on the bed. I snatched up the Bible and held it in front of my face.

The cloud evaporated. The room cleared. Peace and tranquillity came back to me.

I heard John moan. He was in danger. Quickly I left Carolyn and rushed back to John. He was alone, but he was thrashing about on the bed, clawing at his throat as though trying to tear away something that was choking him.

I placed the Bible on his chest. Immediately he became quiet.

I returned to the writing desk, my whole body aching from fear.

A few hours passed. The silence was deep and awful. It chilled me through. Suddenly I heard a sound coming from outside. It was a human sound. A woman was moaning, crying, wailing. I went to the window and threw open the pane. I saw a woman. Her hair was disheveled. She held her hands over her heart. When she saw me in the window, she threw herself forward and shouted: "My child! Give me back my child, you monster."

She fell on her knees and raised her hands, crying the same words over and over until my heart felt as though it were going to break in two. She tore her hair and beat her breast.

I could not look at her or listen to her.

I heard the laugh of the serving women and Count Drakula, and I knew. I knew only too well where her missing child was.

Then Drakula called out something I couldn't understand. His call seemed to be answered from far away by the howling of wolves. Before a minute had passed a pack of wolves poured, like a pent-up dam being released, down upon the woman outside the castle. The woman screamed. The wolves encircled her. They snapped and growled at her and clawed the

earth. I tried not to look. I covered my ears with my hands when she screamed again. I was on the brink of fainting, yet some invisible force made me remain conscious to stare at the horrible scene below. I heard the wolf pack grow quiet, and then they were snarling and charging at the poor, unfortunate creature. Her screams died away in the night, and all I could hear was the monstrous, hideous growling of the pack.

Minutes passed and the horrible noise continued. I felt as though I would go mad. Tears were pouring down my cheeks, and my whole body was bathed with sweat. I felt nauseous and weak. My nails were digging into the palms of my hands. The growls and fighting went on and on until I was certain I would break into hysterics.

Suddenly a silence fell. Cautiously I turned and looked out of the window. Nothing. Everything was as it had been earlier. There were no wolves, no woman; the night, with its brilliant dark sky and shimmering stars, was all that I could see. The shadows of the towers fell gracefully away from the castle, like veils of mourning.

Then I heard someone whispering in the corridor. I went into the sitting room and listened at the door. It was Count Drakula. He was speaking to someone. I supposed it was the serving women.

"Get back to your own places," he shouted. "Your time is not yet come. Wait. Have patience. Tonight is mine. After that. . . ." There was a low, sweet ripple of laughter. "After that, my sweets, you may have your fill of them."

They all laughed. I knew they were there, threatening, planning, plotting. I also knew that the crucifix was affixed to the door on the outside and that they

would be afraid to enter. I thought I would chase them away. I would throw open the door, snatch the cross from its small nail and hold it up to them, driving them off.

Quickly I unlocked the door and threw it open. Drakula and the women towered before me. I snatched down the crucifix and held it in front of my face. Drakula raised his cape and covered himself. The women cringed and rushed backward.

"Go away," I yelled. "Get out of here and leave us alone."

They went. I stood there watching the women retreat down the corridor. I did not realize then that Drakula was not among them. He had vanished.

I replaced the crucifix on its nail and shut the door, locking it and testing to make sure the lock was secure. I threw myself down on my knees. The end was getting near, very near. Would it be the end for us or for them?

Lord help us. Help those dear to us.

Then I heard a shrieking sound just outside the window. I looked out. Again I saw Drakula leave the castle by a window opposite our suite of rooms. He was dressed, I noticed, in John's clothes. He went down the outer wall in the same lizard fashion I'd seen him travel with before. I wished I had a gun or some lethal weapon with which I might destroy him here and now. But I had no weapons, at least none that would be effective on him.

Where was he going now? Hadn't he done enough damage for one night, I thought, remembering the woman, the wolves, the missing child?

The lizard turned into a bat. It spread its wings and drifted out into the night. Its silhouette showed against the full, round moon as it hung suspended ov-

erhead. In the distance the wolves began to howl and moan again. Their sound sent shivers rushing up and down my spine.

I slammed the window shut and went back to the bedroom. Will this night never end?

John is still sleeping soundly, thank heaven. I will go and check on Carolyn. I wish John had thought to put Carolyn here in our room with us. But the Bible will keep John safe while I am out of the room.

What's that?

It sounded like a window blew open somewhere. It sounded as though it was in Carolyn's room. The bat! Dear God! I must go to her.

Heaven protect us all.

Chapter 26

John Hamilton's Journal

October 17th

Victoria's not here!

I awoke with the sun streaming through the window. According to my watch it is almost noon. Damn. I had expected to have the work finished by this time, or at least a good part of it.

Where is Victoria?

I threw back the covers and started to slip into my clothes. "Victoria," I called.

She came hurrying into the bedroom. "Oh, John. I'm so sorry. I'm afraid I fell asleep in Carolyn's room."

When I looked at her I froze. She looked terrible. Her complexion was the color of ash. Her hair was mussed, her clothes wrinkled, but it was her pallor that disturbed me most. She looked ill, very ill.

"Are you all right?" I asked anxiously.

"Why, yes. Why, do I look a fright?" she said, half smiling and trying to smooth down her hair. "There aren't any mirrors in this place. I guess I do look a fright, don't I?"

I didn't want to tell her that it wasn't her looks, it was her color that worried me.

"I'm so deadly tired," she said as she sat down on the side of the bed. "I can't understand why I feel so

completely exhausted. It's like someone has drained me of all my energy."

I felt concern for her but I also realized the hour and felt concern for the lot of us. I didn't want to think of what might have befallen Victoria during the night. We had to get away from here as soon as possible.

"Try to pull yourself together, Victoria. It's late. I've got to get started sinking the wells for the dynamite charges." I finished putting on my shirt and trousers. "Is there any breakfast laid out."

"No, but I'll fix you something right away." She started to get up. She swayed on her feet and sat down again.

"I'll do it," I said. "You'd better take it easy. You've overtired yourself." I slipped on my shoes and socks and started out of the room. "You should haven taken my advice and not tried to brave out the night by staying awake. We had a hard day yesterday. We all needed sleep—especially you. And you needed the right kind of sleep, not a few snatched winks in Carolyn's room."

I tried to make light of the way she looked and the concern I felt for her.

"I'll pull myself together and join you in a minute," Victoria said. I left her and went down to the lower level to search out something to eat. I'd need as much energy as possible to get through the day. There was a lot to be done, and it was all manual labor. I'd need every ounce of my strength.

I found the larder stocked with bread, cheese, milk, some cold meats and fish. I ate some of each, then went to the room where my equipment was stored. I gathered up the sticks of dynamite I'd need, set them with caps and fuses and then started digging the wells in which to plant them.

It was almost two o'clock in the afternoon before Victoria joined me. She looked much better and was dressed in a smart traveling suit, with a jaunty scarf tied about her neck. The rouge and lipstick helped hide the ghostly pallor she had awakened with. I saw that without the advantage of a mirror, her lipstick was a bit smeared and crooked, but nevertheless it made her look a hundred times better.

"How are you feeling now, darling?" I asked, continuing to rip up floor boards and bore holes through brick and stone and mortar.

"I'm all right," Victoria answered. "It's Carolyn I'm really worried about."

"Yes, me too," I told her, "But we'll be out of here soon, and I'm sure Carolyn will rally once she's given an opportunity to gain her strength back."

Victoria, I noticed, was looking at me strangely.

She reached out, tilted my head back and gazed at my neck. "They're gone," she said out of a clear blue sky.

"Gone? What's gone?" I asked as I continued to drill and dig.

"The marks on your neck."

I straightened. Unconsciously my fingers felt the skin at my throat. "What marks?" I didn't truthfully know what she was talking about.

"I noticed them early this morning," Victoria said. "Two tiny pricks. They were swollen and sore looking. I thought they might have gotten to you."

"They?"

"Drakula, his weird women. . . ." Her voice was shaking. Then as she studied me, she sighed. "But the marks are gone. I don't see a trace of them."

I thought suddenly of my nightmare; the women caressing me, the intervention of Drakula. Had they

bled me? If they had, I hadn't realized it. I had noticed no marks on my throat.

I didn't have time to think about such things, although the thought spurred me to work faster.

Victoria tried to help but her strength failed her after a short time, and she had to go back upstairs to lie down. Time was running out for us. I worked furiously through the afternoon, but the work was very difficult; the ground was solid, the digging slow and laborious. The charges weren't set until amost sundown. Finally the last stick of dynamite was in place.

I went upstairs and collected Victoria and Carolyn. Carolyn looked worse than ever. She was hardly conscious of what was going on around her.

"We'd best get ourselves into the far wing," I told them. "This part of the castle might easily collapse when the charges are ignited."

As hurriedly as possible, I herded Carolyn and Victoria into what I felt to be a safer part of the castle. Then I returned to the main section and lit the fuses.

With a frantic dash, I ran back into the far wing and slammed the door behind me. Victoria, Carolyn and I huddled ourselves in the farthest corner and waited for the blasts.

The first explosion knocked the door to the wing off its large, rusted hinges. The second blast threatened to collapse the roof over our heads. The rumbling and roaring sounds were deafening. Dust and smoke curled up all around us. Clouds of soot and powder and ash showered down over us and the whole castle shook and swayed as charge after charge of dynamite went off. Windows were shattered, stone and rock tumbled down. Beneath our feet the floor was like the rolling deck of a ship. I was certain the walls would fall down on us, but they stayed upright and we stayed safe.

Then it was over. The silence that followed the explosions was almost as deafening as the blasts had been. Dust settled. The rocks stopped falling. The mortar ceased to crumble. We waited, our nerves on edge, as the sun slowly began to sink below the horizon.

Then, carrying Carolyn in my arms, we rushed out into the main hallway.

"John, look. The doors. They've been blown off their hinges."

The front door was indeed torn from its moorings. Outside the shades of night were just beginning to fall. Quickly I rushed out and went to the stable. I hitched up the horse and carriage just outside the courtyard. There I told Victoria and Carolyn to wait, and I went back inside the castle to put an end to the evil, monstrous Count Drakula.

Just as I started away from the carriage, I heard the growling of the wolves. Immediately they began to close in on me. I saw that I would never be able to travel the remaining distance between me and the castle before they overtook me. I could see their teeth flashing as they came out of the forest. Their eyes were glazed, their tongues lolled in their mouths, their jaws drooled for the taste of my blood.

They were getting closer and closer. They intersected the paths between me and the castle and between me and the carriage.

I stepped back, but there was nowhere I could run to. They had me surrounded.

"Wolves," I heard Victoria say. The tone of her voice was so casual that I turned and stared at her. She pushed open the carriage door and started to get down.

"Victoria, get back. They'll tear you to pieces," I yelled.

It was as though she didn't hear me.

I watched, terrified as Victoria got down. I couldn't move. The wolves were everywhere. They isolated me from Victoria, from the carriage, from the castle.

"Victoria. Go back," I cried. But she paid me no mind. She started to walk toward the circle of wolves that ringed me.

The wolves were getting ready to close in on me.

My legs felt weak, my body was bathed in sweat. I stood there panic-stricken. The wolves were growling low in their throats, their eyes sparkling with hunger.

Victoria walked straight toward them and me. She strayed into a patch of moonlight and I almost did not recognize my own wife. She had changed. There was something unnatural in the way she walked, the way she looked. She wasn't carrying the Bible, I noticed. She wasn't wearing the crucifix for protection. She merely walked like one possessed, and she walked straight toward the wolf pack.

She was humming slightly to herself as she neared us. The wolves heard her strange tune and turned. Victoria didn't falter. She continued to come amongst us. The wolves looked up at her as she came into their midst. I was too terrified to call out, too terrified to speak.

She merely stood there, looking down at the wolves at her feet. Then she raised her arm and pointed toward the forest. The wolves, looking frightened, scampered off into the undergrowth with their tails between their legs.

The wolves had no sooner disappeared than Victoria collapsed onto the ground. I rushed to her and gathered her up into my arms. I carried her back toward the carriage and stretched her out on the seat opposite Carolyn. Carolyn was just sitting there

where we had left her, staring straight out at the night. Her eyes were dead, her mouth sagged, her expression was bland and barren, her skin the color of the moonlight.

"Carolyn," I said harshly. "Help me. Help Victoria."

Carolyn didn't move a muscle. She just sat there, staring.

Alone I struggled on and finally got Victoria positioned comfortably in the carriage. Carolyn was no help, I decided, no help to anyone.

As I started to get out of the carriage, I happened to notice that I'd dislodged the scarf Victoria had had tied about her neck. It had come loose and was lying across one shoulder. I went to retie it. My hand stopped in mid air. I saw the marks on her throat. Two tiny pricks swelled out from the jugular vein. They looked festered and swollen and sore.

"Drakula," I breathed aloud.

I thought Carolyn stirred when I spoke his name, but when I glanced at her she was as I had left her.

I had to get back into the castle. I had to destroy Drakula. There was still sufficient dynamite left with the supplies. I'd drive back the stake and then set off the last of the dynamite and level the castle to the ground. No one would ever again be tempted to test the legend of Count Drakula and his vampire hoard. I couldn't risk the chance of having another nonbeliever such as myself bring havoc down upon his head and upon the innocent heads of others.

I glanced up at the night sky. It was very late. If I could not claim Drakula tonight, I would barricade myself in the far wing of the castle and wait until morning. It would be useless to try and escape on foot during the night. They were all at large at night; my chances would be nil.

The wolves started to howl again, and I could see them darting nervously through the undergrowth just beyond the tree line.

Now I knew why Victoria had the power she did over those wolves. Drakula's blood was mingled with hers. She was a fresh victim and still carried the stigma of his unnatural power. The wolves had smelled the blood of Drakula on Victoria and had obeyed her. She had not been afraid of them because she was going through the initial stages of becoming one of them. Their keen senses detected it and they would not harm her.

I had to get us away.

Just before I stepped inside the castle I saw the moon go behind a cloud. The darkness was deepening and I would have to hurry if I wanted to accomplish what I had set out to do.

Luck was with me so far, I told myself when I saw that the door to the cellar, like the other doors, had been dislodged from its hinges. I rushed toward it and threw it aside.

Down the dark stone steps I ran, pausing only once to light a torch to illuminate my way.

At the bottom of the stairs the corridor was blocked with fallen rocks, boulders and debris. The ceiling had collapsed in several places and I had to work my way frantically over piles of dirt and stone and chunks of rock. I clawed through the endless debris until at last I saw the door to the room at the end. It was open, beckoning to me like the finger of death.

I shoved away the last of the debris and pushed myself forward into the room. I held the torch high over my head. The coffin was still there, sitting directly in the center of the room. Drakula was stretched out, lying in it, staring up at the ceiling above him.

I looked around for the stake. I had thrown it aside

when Carolyn had come down to stop me from destroying Drakula the first time.

I didn't see it. Could Drakula have taken it away?

Frantically I began searching the room for some weapon, some implement with which to destroy the evil count. I saw nothing.

I heard someone moan. Drakula was coming to life.

Quickly I turned. As I did so, my foot kicked against something long and heavy. I looked down. The stake! It was under my foot. Quickly I bent and picked it up.

I started toward the coffin.

Drakula's hand flailed the air. He reached out for some support by which to pull himself up. Then he started to rise.

I was too late. In the light of my torch I saw Drakula begin to emerge from his casket.

Chapter 27

John Hamilton's Journal

October 18th

I stood there, transfixed, as Drakula pulled himself up from the dirt-laden bottom of his casket. I was too late. Too late!

"So you think you can destroy me, John Hamilton," Count Drakula sneered. He chuckled low in his throat and wiped his hands together, as though washing them clean of the vile deeds he had committed and would continue to commit. "You will never destroy me."

He started for me. His eyes were boring into me. They held me captive. I found I couldn't move. I felt I could not escape those terrible eyes. He was weakening me. My legs started to tremble, my whole body felt as though it was being sapped of strength. Drakula hovered over me like a black cloud, the cloud of doom. I cringed and cowered before him. I was helpless to defend myself. The stake seemed cemented to my hand. I couldn't move.

"Drop the stake, John Hamilton," Drakula commanded.

Instantly my hand opened, acting as though it had a mind of its own. The stake clanged to the floor.

Again the count laughed, and I fell to my knees. I crossed my hands in front of my face and tried to ward off Drakula's hypnotic spell. I had to prevent

him from taking over my will. I blocked my eyes from his; it helped clear my thoughts. I pinched my eyes shut and tried to blank my mind of everything except my need to destroy this heinous fiend.

The crucifix! I had it somewhere, I thought. I remembered taking it down from the door when we left the suite of rooms. I had slipped it into my pocket. Quickly I searched for it.

Drakula continued to force his will upon me. I fought with every ounce of my being.

Finally my fingers closed over the tiny gold cross. Slowly I pulled it out of my pocket and held it up before me. I heard Drakula gasp, and he hid himself behind the folds of his cape. His power seemed to waver, his domination grew less overpowering.

I grabbed my advantage. "Get back, Drakula," I warned as I again snatched up the stake and got to my feet.

I heard movement behind me and glanced around.

"You must not do this, John," Carolyn said as she came slowly through the door. She was so weak she could hardly stand, yet she came toward me without faltering. She was not alone I noticed. The serving women were with her.

I held up the cross to them.

It seemed to have no effect on Carolyn. She continued to advance toward me. The women encircled me. Like the circle of wolves, they seemed to snarl and growl as they closed in on me. I tried to ward them off but the cross seemed inadequate to hold the entire company of vampires at bay. I could see their eyes flashing at me, their sharp white teeth gleaming as they smiled and licked their lips. Even Carolyn was smiling and licking her lips.

"Give me the cross, John," Carolyn said. She held out her hand.

"No. Get back, Carolyn. Get back." I knew now that she was lost to us. She was one of them. There was no denying that.

"Give me the cross," she said again.

Drakula stood beside his coffin. He kept the cloak high, half hiding himself behind it. He said nothing. He was laughing softly as his women drew nearer and nearer. The sound of his evil laugh grated on my nerves, rubbed me against the grain. I wanted to put my hands over my ears to shut out the sound, but I had to hold the cross high and hide myself in its shadow. I stood breathlessly waiting for the attack. I could feel the women behind me, pressing ever closer.

In my hand the stake felt heavy and hot. Count Drakula continued to smile his fiendish smile and laugh his devilish laugh.

The stake began to tremble in my hand. The power of the crucifix made my arm raise. I aimed the stake directly at Count Drakula's heart. The cross seemed to glow in my hand as I felt strength build. I moved my arm back, balancing the stake like a spear. Then, with a mighty thrust, I propelled it forward. I heard Drakula groan and clutch his chest.

Then slowly he straightened himself and raised an arm. He pointed his finger at me. His face was twisted with pain.

"Someday," he warned in a croaking voice. "Someday I will take my revenge, John Hamilton. You cannot destroy me. No one can. No one. Someday. . . ."

He started to buckle. His hands gripped the hilt of the shaft which was stuck deep in his chest. Blood gushed from the wound. The count was sinking, sinking fast. His eyes rolled in his head. He stood there, rigid and stiff. Then he toppled backward into the coffin. With one last agonizing cry he tried to yank out the stake on which his heart was impaled. He

strained and groaned, but the stake remained embedded in his heart. His hellish eyes finally dropped closed. His mouth gaped open. He gasped one more time and then lay still in his coffin.

When he died, the wolves in the forest started to howl at the moon. A moment later they were still. Everything grew as quiet as death. The women encircling me began to fade before my eyes. They grew dimmer and dimmer until they were but specters that hovered in the air like forgotton melodies. And then they, too, vanished into nothingness. I could hear them sighing, moaning as the wind carried them out into the night.

The tiny cross glowed brightly as Carolyn stood before it, staring intently at its brilliance. She leaned forward and touched her lips lightly to the crucifix. Then she closed her eyes. She fell at my feet. I did not need to touch her to know that she was dead.

Her mouth curled into the trace of a smile. Yes, Carolyn was dead, but she was at peace at last.

I knelt beside her and took her hand in mine. The color seemed to rush back into her cheeks. She was smiling. She was with her God. She was saved at last, safe in a mortal death and not trapped in the death of the undead.

Slowly, reluctantly, I left Carolyn and went to examine the dead Count Drakula. His body was already beginning to lose its flesh. It was returning to its skeletal state. Suddenly the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from my sight. Nothing lay before me but the dried, bare skeleton with the long, sharp stake sticking through the rib cage. Count Drakula was no more.

Determined to rid the world of him forever, I rushed back upstairs and into the equipment room, intent upon bringing the bloodthirsty monster's castle

down over his last remains. I would bury him under tons of rock and slag. No one would ever fear the evil Count Drakula again.

But when I got to the equipment room, the ceiling and walls were collapsed and my supplies were no longer accessible to me. Everything was buried. There was nothing I could recover. No dynamite, nothing. Nothing at all.

Feeling tired and weary, I went back down into the cellar. Again I stared down at the skeleton of Count Drakula. I tested the stake to make certain it was securely lodged where it would keep Drakula harmless and inert.

I extinguished the torch and gently picked Carolyn up in my arms. Her lifeless body hung limp and relaxed. With one last look toward the casket and its ugly skeleton, I made my way out of the depressing, dungeonlike room. I went back down the littered corridor, up the worn stone steps and out of Castle Drakula forever.

As I came out into the clear blue night, I saw Victoria start to get down from the carriage. She saw me with Carolyn and hurried toward us.

One glance at my face told her Carolyn's sad story. Victoria just stood there for a second looking up at me. Then tears started to stream out of her eyes and down her cheeks. She looked lovingly at her sister's still form. Her shoulders shook. Victoria cried softly as she bent and kissed the mouth of the dead Carolyn. She took Carolyn's hand in hers and held it tightly as I carried Carolyn's body back to the carriage. Neither Victoria nor I spoke as we mounted the carriage and got ready to depart.

I took one final look at Castle Drakula, and then I snapped the reins and started the carriage down the winding, twisted road. Behind us Castle Drakula stood

tall and dark against a red sky. Every stone of its broken battlements was articulated against the light of the rising sun.

Dawn was already beginning to break. It seemed impossible to believe that so many hours had passed.

Or had they?

The dawning of a new day made my spirits rise.

And so we left the Carpathian Mountains behind. I urged the horse on. We had a long, sad journey yet ahead of us.

Chapter 28

The castle stood high in the mountains, over a rocky gorge. Many people had lived within its walls, and many had died. No one would live in it now. For forty years it had remained empty and apart, and in all the world not a living soul cared if it stood or fell.

Not a living soul. . . .

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